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ABSTRACT

Commemorating the first 10 years of publication of the School Community Journal, this book presents a collection of articles from those 10 years and reflects its diverse contents. The articles are: (1) "The Community of the School" (Sam Redding); (2) "How My Immigrant Experience Shaped My Work with Families and Schools" (Dorothy Rich); (3) "The Politics of Virtue: A New Compact for Leadership in Schools" (Thomas J. Sergiovanni); (4) "The Impact of Race on School Change Teams" (Alison A. Carr-Chellman); (5) "In Search of the Elusive Magic Bullet: Parental Involvement and Student Outcomes" (Kim O. Yap and Donald Y. Enoki); (6) "Childhood: Our Children's Voices" (Frances K. Kochan); (7) "Our 'Changing' Town, Our 'Changing' School: Is Common Ground about 'Good' Classroom Practices Possible?" (Jean L. Konzal); (8) "Recommendations for Research on the Effectiveness of School, Family, and Community Partnerships" (Nancy Feyl Chavkin); (9) "Building a Learning Community through Teacher Action Research: Honoring Teacher Wisdom in Three Chicago Public Schools" (Norman Weston); (10) "Proactive Thoughts on Creating Safe Schools" (Constance M. Perry); (11) "Community-Based Education" (Christine J. Villani and Douglas Atkins); (12) "Improving Parent Involvement Programs and Practice: A Qualitative Study of Parent Perceptions" (Amy J. L. Baker); (13) "Improving Parent Involvement Programs and Practice: A Qualitative Study of Teacher Perceptions" (Amy J. L. Baker); (14) "The Peabody Family Involvement Initiative: Preparing Preservice Teachers for Family/School Collaboration" (Laurie Katz and Jerold P. Bauch); (15) "Parents' Educational Beliefs: Implications for Parent Participation in School Reforms" (Lee Shumow); (16) "Parent Involvement: The Key to Improved Student Achievement" (Steven R. Hara and Daniel J. Burke); (17) "Family-School Partnerships in Prekindergarten At-Risk Programs: An Exploratory Study" (Brent A. McBride, Ji-Hi Bae, and Thomas R. Range); (18) "Parent Involvement in American Public Schools: A Historic Perspective 1642-2000" (Diana Hiatt-Michael); (19) "Relationship, The Fourth 'R': The Development of a Classroom Community" (Nancy Meltzoff); (20) "Minimal Parental Involvement" (David J. Dwyer and Jeffrey B. Hecht); (21) "Family

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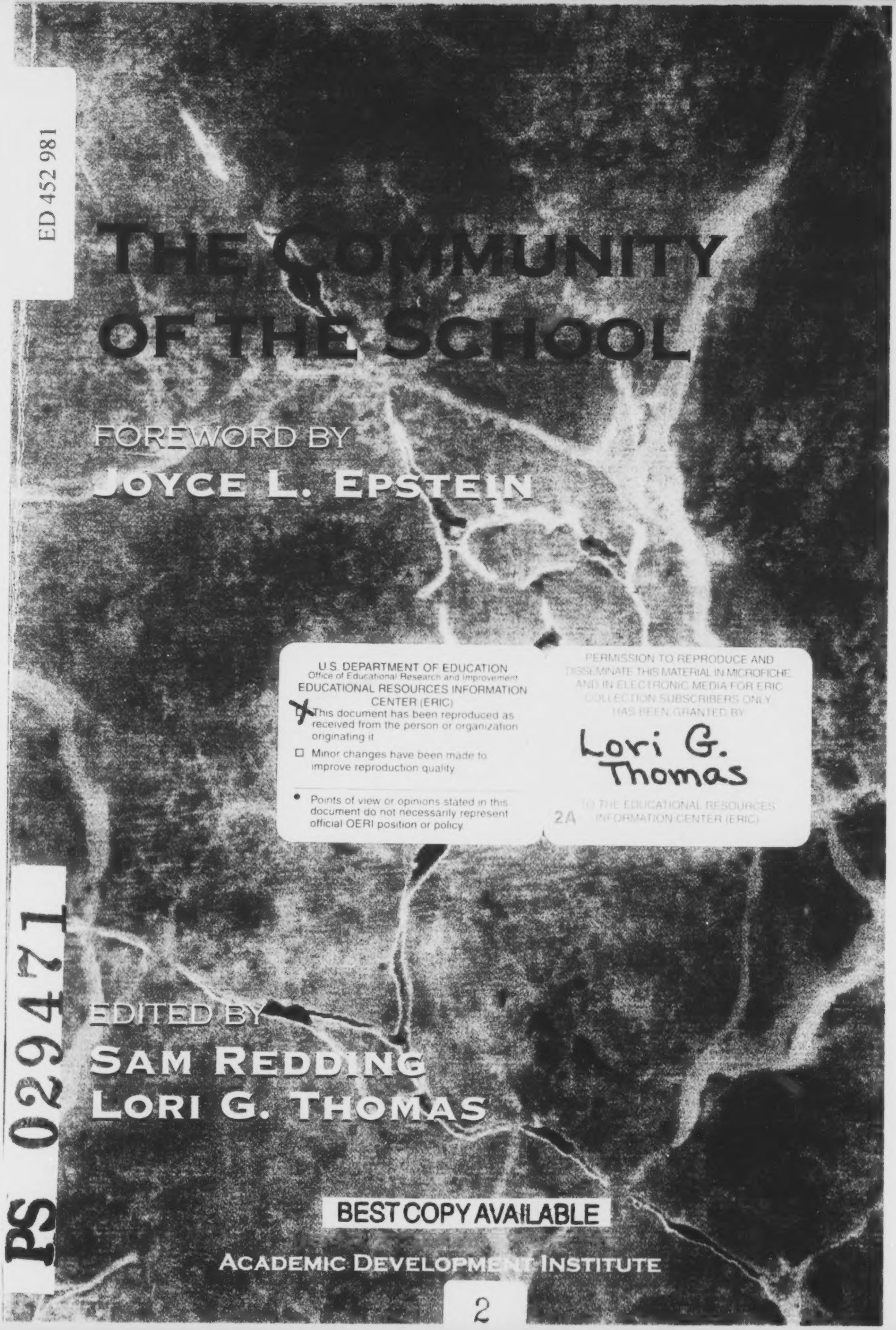

THE COMMUNITY OF THE SCHOOL

FOREWORD BY

JOYCE L. EPSTEIN

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The Community of the School

Editors
Sam Redding
and
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Foreword
Joyce L. Epstein

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"There is no better place to create a community of caring than in our schools – the heart of our future."

Patricia Gándara

Preface

The Community of the School commemorates the first ten years of publication of the *School Community Journal*. Since the first issue appeared in 1991, the journal has held that the hope for American education lies in the cooperative pursuits of people intimately attached to their schools. To this image of the school *as* a community, the *School Community Journal* is devoted.

The school is often discussed in terms of its relationship to the community, suggesting that the school is something apart from community. In fact, the school exists within a mosaic of overlapping communities and is, itself, capable of functioning as a community.

A community is a group of people associated with one another who share some common values. Geography does not make community, nor does membership nor casual affiliation. When the school functions *as* a community rather than *in* a community, its constituents (students, parents, teachers, staff) associate with one another and share common values about the education of children.

At the root, members of the school community assume responsibility for one another. *Those* children become *our* children, and parents are not external agents but full partners in the education of their children and of each other's children. Teachers are not isolated practitioners of pedagogy, but professionals integrated into the web of community and buoyed by common purpose.

It is our hope that *The Community of the School* will contribute to a sense of common cause for all members of school communities in order to distribute the load as well as the joy of caring.

Acknowledgments

We owe a great debt to three members of our National Advisory Board, now deceased, who gave so much to our cause in advice, support, and credibility: Ralph Tyler, James S. Coleman, and Margaret C. Wang. We also wish to thank the Laboratory for Student Success and its directors–Margaret C. Wang and JoAnn Manning–for their tutelage and encouragement in our research and publishing.

Sam Redding and Lori G. Thomas
Lincoln, Illinois
March, 2001

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Foreword

In ten years, Sam Redding and his editorial staff, advisors, reviewers, and hundreds of contributors turned a new and needed idea into a viable and helpful journal. Redding always intended the *School Community Journal* to reflect the diversity of a real community. Submissions were invited from researchers, administrators, teachers, school boards, parents, and others who were working collaboratively to develop the sense of community in schools. The contributors have shared a mix of quantitative and qualitative research, descriptions and evaluations of programs, reviews, and essays.

The design of the *School Community Journal* was and remains particularly appropriate because the field of school, family, and community partnerships has been distinguished by a close connection of research, policy, and practice. Research interests and practical goals for improving parental and community involvement have emerged and increased simultaneously. Studies of family involvement and home-school-community relations have been conducted in cooperation with educators, based on the experiences, questions, and concerns of parents, teachers, administrators, community partners, and students. Results of research have been swiftly translated and applied in practice (Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon, 1997).

There is a growing recognition that all elements of school improvement (e.g., challenging curricula, instruction for active learning, rigorous assessments, and school and classroom organization) are more likely to succeed if families are involved in ways that help students focus on learning and schoolwork. It also is clear that all teachers and administrators must be prepared to create effective partnership programs to ensure good schools and successful students (Epstein, 2001).

When the *School Community Journal* first appeared, it looked tentative and temporary. Now, stable and formidable, it serves as a serious outlet for exploratory and intensive studies, formative and summative program evaluations, analytic frameworks, and discussions of important topics. This eclectic collection of articles from the first ten years of publication reflects the journal's diverse contents. It includes reports from school principals Hara and Burke on their practical approaches to partnerships; exploratory analyses of student outcomes by school district evaluators Yap and Enoki; qualitative studies of parents and teachers by A. Baker; exploratory quantitative analyses of partnerships in early childhood by McBride, Rane, and Bae; analyses of family involvement in reading by Baker and Moss; an historical review of families and children in education by Hiatt-Michael; results of coursework on family involvement for preservice teachers by Katz and Bauch; and many more.

School, family, and community partnerships is a young and vibrant field of study. Increasingly, undergraduate and graduate students and professors in sociology, psychology, and education are reading about and researching all aspects of school, family, and community partnerships at various grade levels and in diverse communities. As the field grows, research, policy, and practice will continue to improve — something to watch in the *School Community Journal* over the next 10 years.

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The Community of the School

Sam Redding

The research reported herein was supported in part by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the U. S. Department of Education through a grant to the Mid-Atlantic Laboratory for Student Success at the Temple University Center for Research in Human Development and Education. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the position of the supporting agencies, and no official endorsement should be inferred.

Introduction

"Community" is a term that is much used and little defined. Because of this rhetorical abuse, the concept of community is sometimes given short shrift by educational scholars. But, in addition to its classical roots in Aristotelian discourse, the idea of community is central to the 150-year intellectual history of sociology and has enjoyed a surge of popular and scholarly attention in the past decade. In connection with schools, the concept of community has been bolstered by a merger with research and thought on the family's role in children's learning (curriculum of the home). Contemporary writing on "school community" tends to blend the sociologist's advocacy of community as an antidote to the managerial tendencies of mass society with the psychologist's proposition that school learning is impacted by factors outside the school, especially those residing in the family and peer group. Thus, a school community is typically portrayed as: a) inclusive of families of students and some elements of the community beyond the school doors, and b) operating on the basis of shared values, trust, expectations, and obligations rather than tasks, rules, and hierarchies.

Tracing the intellectual history of community, we find that value-based, intimate associations of one kind or another, larger than a kinship group but sufficiently small to allow for personal contact among members, has been

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idealized as a counterbalance to: a) excessive individualism, b) the family's limiting strictures on the individual, and c) the remote, impersonal, and inexorable forces of mass society. Problems identified with schooling in America today certainly fall into these same three categories of concern. Children and youth are often described as selfish and uncaring, disadvantaged by family circumstance, and/or alienated and influenced by mass culture. Perhaps then, school community, even if idealized, contains seeds of remedy for problems with school-age children.

Clifford W. Cobb, defining community, wrote:

> In a community, people take responsibility for collective activity and are loyal to each other beyond immediate self-interest. They work together on the basis of shared values. They hold each other accountable for commitments. In earlier centuries, a person was born into a community and a set of reciprocal obligations. Now, those who seek an identity as part of a larger whole must invent community by voluntarily committing themselves to institutions or groups (Cobb, 1992, p. 2).

Cobb's definition of community includes the essential aspects of a modern understanding of the term: responsibility, collective activity, loyalty, working together, shared values, accountability, commitment, identity, voluntarism. If we trace sociological thought for the past two centuries, we find that Cobb's components of community are the proffered remedies for a variety of social ills, put forth by thinkers of various ideological inclinations. The community – through the eyes of a diverse set of thinkers over the ages – mediates the numbing intrusion of mass society; checks the barren isolation of the individual cast against a vast, materialistic machinery; engenders sentiments of virtue; and lifts the horizons of the one above the leveling weight of kinship.

Historical Overview

Counterbalance to Industrialism

Edmund Burke, the British statesman, writing from the fount of the industrial revolution in the 18th century, offered that, "To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love to our country, and to mankind" (Burke, 1960, p. 44). His statement was an affirmation of community at a time when larger societal forces seemed to be obliterating traditional social attachments. A hundred years after Burke, the Frenchman Emile Durkheim offered a similar complaint and remedy for the condition of *anomie,* the ambient rootlessness he related to suicide and other symptoms of the individual's sense of diminution in the face of industrial, bureaucratic, capitalistic society. Durkheim's remedy was the strengthening of the guild, a medieval invention to be resurrected anew; attachment to the social unit of the guild would provide the individual a shield from the overwhelming, untempered, and unpredictable winds of society, and would offer the context of expectations and obligations necessary to nurture autonomous but morally grounded individuals. Just as Durkheim feared the powerful vagaries of industrial society writ large, he also was suspicious of the limiting influences of the family and clan on the individual (Lasch, 1991, p. 144). The guild, or similar mid-sized social structures, like Burke's little platoons (the parish, lodge, neighborhood association, local political entity, etc.), would lift the individual from the restrictive web of close kin and, at the same time, buffer him from the larger society.

The Voluntary Association

Alexis de Tocqueville visited America and wrote of his observations in the 1830s, after Burke but before Durkheim. Tocqueville saw in upstart America a chance for a new beginning, a disruption of the path of history; and nothing impressed him more than the abundant voluntary associations. While Tocqueville promoted human liberty, he feared unfettered individualism; the voluntary association was a perfect mediating device—the individual freely chose attachment to a group, and membership in that group called forth necessary virtues of loyalty, altruism, and responsibility. "For only freedom can deliver the members of a community from that isolation which is the lot of the individual left to his own devices and, compelling them to get in touch with each other, promote an active sense of fellowship" (Tocqueville, trans. 1955, p. xiv).

Tradition-Directed, Inner-Directed, Other-Directed

Coming forward to the 1960s, we find in David Riesman's *Lonely Crowd* (1961) a crystallization of accepted wisdom on the contemporary zeitgeist and its predecessors in Western history. Again, community in its various forms is the centerpiece of the analysis. Riesman's book, he explains, is about social character, and social character is "that part of 'character' which is shared among significant social groups and which, as most contemporary social scientists define it, is the product of the experience of these groups" (Riesman, 1961, p.4). Social character is, in large part, the imprint of culture on the individual. Riesman's critique of social character traces three epochs of Western history, insisting that while each era was distinct in its prevailing social organization, the influences of all three are present in contemporary American society.

In a tradition-directed social order, the prevailing mode of social organization in Western history prior to the Renaissance, the individual conformed to the patterns of life associated with his clan or caste; behavior was prescribed by rigid expectations of etiquette; and the individual was valued because he "belonged." "The tradition-directed person," explains Riesman, "... hardly thinks of himself as an individual. Still less does it occur to him that he might shape his own destiny in terms of personal, lifelong goals or that the destiny of his children might be separate from that of the family group" (Riesman, 1961, p. 17). The community consists largely of family and kin, and the web of values is tight and strong. Shame is the punishment for violating the community's behavioral expectations.

Beginning with the Renaissance and extending into the twentieth century, population growth slowed in advanced cultures, opportunities expanded, rationalism and science replaced superstition and myth, and people became increasingly mobile—likely to move in circles beyond their immediate clan. Tradition remains strong, but is splintered and differentiated; the division of labor increases; society becomes more stratified; voluntary associations serve as communities. Behavior could not be controlled by rules of etiquette because social situations became increasingly complex, so children were raised to possess inner resources that would guide them beyond the influence of the immediate community. In these inner-directed societies, "the source of direction for the individual is 'inner' in the sense that it is implanted early in life by the elders and directed toward generalized but nonetheless inescapably destined goals" (Riesman, 1961, p. 15). The internal gyroscope of ingrained values guides the individual through the course of life, and the individual is dependent upon parent-like authorities for setting the gyroscope in motion and keeping it spinning. The consequence of straying from the "inner pilot" is to feel guilt.

Riesman saw the inner-directed social character reaching its zenith in the nineteenth century, just as the first glimpses of other-direction began to appear. Tocqueville saw other-directedness in the friendly, shallow, unrooted "new man" in America. The central characteristic of this new man was a demand for approval by others. Beginning first in the urban upper-classes, other-directedness has moved finally into the broad reaches of modern society. Education, leisure, a service economy, smaller families, stable population, and more permissive parenting are emblematic of the other-directed social order. The peer group becomes more important to the child, the family less. Contemporaries are the source of direction. Children are increasingly influenced by friends and the mass media. Behavior is not patterned by rules and practice (etiquette) or by inner controls, but by close attention to (and sensitivity to) the actions and wishes of others. Modern man has an insatiable need for approval. "The family is no longer a closely knit unit to which [the child] early becomes attentive. In these respects the other-directed person resembles the tradition-directed person: both live in a group milieu and lack the inner-directed person's capacity to go it alone" (Riesman, 1961, p. 25).

Let us agree with Riesman that the three categories of social character—tradition-directed, inner-directed, and outer-directed—exist in varying degrees within each individual and are singularly more prominent among members of various cultures, sub-cultures and communities today. That being the case, it is not surprising that contemporary social critics see evidence of excessive individualism (selfishness), familial and cultural disadvantage, and valueless, rudderless youth.

Communitarianism

In the 1980s, James S. Coleman and his colleagues wrote a series of books and articles based on an extensive study of public and private schools. Coleman demonstrated that Catholic schools were more effective than public schools with children of all socioeconomic backgrounds. The Catholic schools spent less money per student but achieved higher test scores and lower drop-out rates. The fact that Catholic schools obtained these impressive results even in inner-city neighborhoods where students were typically non-Catholic and from low socioeconomic, black and Hispanic backgrounds showed that the Catholic school success was due neither to the religious nor the socioeconomic background of its students. Instead, the success was due to conditions of the schools. Catholic schools nurtured a cohesive sense of community that included adults as well as children. "All these results emphasize the importance of the embeddedness of young persons in the enclaves of adults most proximate to them, first and most prominently the family and second, a surrounding community of adults" (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987, p. 229).

In a 1982 study of 54 inner-city private schools (mostly Catholic), James Cibulka, Timothy O'Brien and Donald Zewe attributed success of poor children (academic and behavioral) to the "sense of community that existed among faculty, students and parents" (p. 13). They found that successful schools placed great emphasis on parent-teacher communication, sought and valued parents' opinions, and supported parental priorities relative to children's intellectual and moral development.

Robert Bellah, a professor of sociology at Berkeley, assembled a research team and commenced to interview Americans of every stripe before publishing their findings in 1985 in *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Interspersed with the case-study vignettes of ordinary Americans, the Bellah team cast a manifesto of communitarianism, deriving its philosophical perspective largely from Tocqueville. It was Tocqueville who used the term "habits of the heart" to describe the mores of family life, religious tradition, and participation in local politics that contributed to a unique American character (Bellah, 1985, p. vii). It was also Tocqueville who wrote with a mixture of awe and anxiety about American individualism, and Bellah captured this Tocquevillian angst to thread through his treatise a fear of rampant individualism. Bellah's call for community is his proposition of a cure for Riesman's inner-directed, individualistic, asocial man.

For Amitai Etzioni, the threat of excessive individualism is real, but so is the predominant other-directedness he sees in our society. Etzioni has echoed Bellah's clarion call for community from the perspective of a student of formal organizations. He has added intellectual muscle to a growing communitarian movement. Etzioni advocates "responsive communities," characterized by non-coercive affirmation of values, approximating Riesman's notion of autonomy. A community must be bound by some coherent set of values, but the community must not impose values (as would a tradition-directed culture in Riesman's anaylsis); rather, a community must form freely around a set of values and include members persuaded of the validity of those values (Etzioni, 1991).

Thomas Sergiovanni (1994) resurrected the "*gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*" interpretation of the nineteenth-century German sociologist, Ferdinand Tönnies, and applied it to education. Sergiovanni called for a paradigm shift; schools should be thought of as communities rather than organizations. The culture of a school, its *gemeinschaft*, could foster trust, cooperation, intimacy, and responsibility – all necessary in opposition to the societal tendency toward *gesellschaft*, the scientific-managerial model of control through impersonal rules and hierarchies. Sergiovanni's view of community was organic and collective, in contrast to the emphasis on individually-selected associations advocated by Cobb, Coleman, and others.

Social Capital

James S. Coleman deserves credit for expanding upon our understanding of social capital through his research and writing, making it a topic of genuine scholarly inquiry. Looking for the determining ingredients of an economically healthy society, economists isolated physical capital and human capital – tools and training – as the engines of economic vitality. Coleman and others added social capital – the network of norms, obligations, expectations, and trust that forms among people who associate with one another and share common values. Applying the concept to childrearing, Coleman explained: "What I mean by social capital in the raising of children is the norms, the social networks, and the relationships between adults and children that are of value for the child's growing up. Social capital exists within the family, but also outside the family, in the community" (Coleman, 1987, p. 36).

Social capital emerged in the 1990s as a philosophical linchpin in communitarian proposals to solve a range of social, educational, and economic problems. Robert Putnam's 1995 article, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," combined a well-stated treatise with an apt and memorable title, and became a mostly lauded but also highly debated exposition of the detrimental ripple-effects of declining social capital in America. Putnam, a Harvard professor of International Affairs, derived his notions of the efficacy of social capital first from studies of regional differences in government effectiveness in Italy. Putnam found that the effectiveness of government agencies was greater in the north of Italy than in the south, and he posited that a cause of this difference was the unequal distribution of social capital evidenced in the north's greater propensity for voluntary associations — voter turnout, newspaper readership, membership in choral societies and football clubs. Because people were more inclined to associate with one another, face-to-face, through groups that cut horizontal swaths across social strata, they developed a greater sense of trust in and obligation to people beyond their kinship group. Thus, their civic engagement was more active; their ability to cooperate more advanced.

Applying this analysis to the United States, Putnam found that from 1960 to the mid-1990s (but especially in the first half of that time span), voter turnout declined, church attendance dropped, and membership in voluntary groups such as PTA, Boy Scouts, Red Cross, service organizations, fraternal societies, and labor unions ebbed sharply. Putnam's most poignant example of this reduction in civic engagement (and the concomitant possibility for developing social capital) was the fact that while the number of individual bowlers increased 10% between 1980 and 1993, the number of bowlers in leagues declined by 40%. Thus, the trend was toward a more individualistic approach to bowling, and "bowling alone" became a synecdoche for a larger social trend. Putnam pointed to a corresponding decline in Americans' level of trust in each other, in government, and in other institutions as a consequence of (and contributor to) their retreat from social and civic engagement.

While participation in local, face-to-face associations was in decline, Americans were more likely to belong to mass organizations, such as AARP or professional and political-interest groups, that required little personal connection among members. Asking why Americans were withdrawing from secondary group association and moving toward tertiary groups that were more remote and less demanding of time, Putnam suggested several causes: 1) the movement of women into the labor force, 2) mobility, 3) fewer marriages, more divorces, fewer children, 4) the replacement of locally-owned and operated business by multinational corporations, and 5) the privatization and individualization of entertainment through technological changes (television replaced the movie theatre which replaced vaudeville). His most convincing argument may have been his linkage of new modes of entertainment, which increasingly allow for solitary experience at the expense of social engagement.

In their report, *Becoming an Adult in a Changing Society* (1987), James S. Coleman and Torsten Husén described three phases of family-school relationships that correspond with three levels of economic development. In Phase I, the family lives at a subsistence level, relying on children for work. Phase I families limit the growth of the child, and the school's role is to free the child from his family and expand the possibilities for his development. In Phase II, the industrial economy, the goals of the family and the school converge, with both institutions seeking the improvement of the child's ultimate economic situation. In Phase III, post-industrial affluence, parents view childrearing as an impediment to the pursuits of their adult lives and invest little time and energy in the development of their children. They expect the school to fill the void. This "hiring of professionals" to provide programmatic and therapeutic surrogates for the nurturing and educative practices of extended families and close communities is a further explanation of how social capital can decline, even among the educated and affluent classes.

Amitai Etzioni (1993) explained how the formation of social capital within families, traditionally the greatest engine for its formation, is in jeopardy because of the reduced amount of time many children spend with parents. Etzioni explained:

> The fact is that parenting cannot be carried out over the phone, however well meaning and loving the calls may be. It requires physical presence. The notion of 'quality time' (not to mention 'quality phone calls') is a lame excuse for parental absence; it presupposes that bonding and education can take place in brief time bursts, on the run. *Quality time occurs within quantity time.* As you spend time with one's children—fishing, gardening, camping, or 'just' eating a meal—there are unpredictable moments when an opening occurs and education takes hold (Etzioni, 1993, p. 57).

Dana Mack (1997) provided a cogent analysis of changes in family life that parallel the trends in society, diminishing the social capital even within the most basic primary group. Mack's critique varied from that of Putnam and others in that it found fault with a cloying insistence on artificial and externally-imposed allegiance to the group. Mack's perspective harkened back to Riesman, showing alarm at the educationist's disregard for inner-directedness. This approach varied from the Coleman-Putnam emphasis on social capital, but it did not contradict it. Coleman wrote of the benefits of social capital as an asset to the individual within the context of rational choice theory. Putnam stressed the voluntary selection of associations rather than the contrived imposition of social bonds as the threshold to the accumulation of social capital.

Mack challenged education's mimicry of corporate models, as had Sergiovanni, but Mack was more concerned with the imposition of other-directedness than with the remoteness of an organizational mentality. Mack wrote:

> It is no accident that the way schools manage kids is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish from the way corporations manage employees. . . . But there is a far more widespread and spurious connection between educational and industrial psychology today – the tendency of both to rest on the assumption that human productivity is greatest where the needs and interests of individuals are submerged to the needs and interests of groups, and where the individual is manipulated to adapt to the demands of group solidarity. . . . In schools, the increasing preoccupation with group psychodynamics and their ostensible relationship to personal motivation and productivity is troubling" (Mack, 1997, p. 143).

For children, social capital is a mediating variable, a consequence of institutional (family, neighborhood, community, church) structures and arrangements, and an asset banked and withdrawn in varying amounts. In the end, the wealth of social capital available to an individual child, and that child's ability to take advantage of this potential benefit, contribute to that child's success in school and in life.

Families and Schools: The Curriculum of the Home

Herbert J. Walberg (1984) summarized the research on the family's impact on learning. Walberg justified changes in education practices by asserting education's connection to national economic development, and he did more than ask parents for their cooperation; he contended that schools should take the initiative in establishing partnerships with the home. "Research shows that both home conditions that are conducive to learning and the relationship of the home to the school have deteriorated in recent decades, but school/home partnership programs can bring about dramatic improvements," Walberg stated (1984, p. 400). Walberg claimed not only that the home environment strongly affects a child's learning; he proclaimed that schools could influence the home environment by establishing partnerships with families.

A quarter-century of research has convinced most educators that influences of the home weigh heavily on a child's achievement in school. Dissection of family life has produced various laundry lists of characteristics of an optimal home environment. Schools and other organizations are teaching parents to put into practice the components of family life that we call the "curriculum of the home." This curriculum does not consist of subject matter but of patterns of habit formation and attitude development that prepare a child for academic learning and sustain the child through the years of schooling. The curriculum of the home "predicts academic learning twice as well as the socioeconomic status of families. This curriculum includes informed parent/child conversations about everyday events, encouragement and discussion of leisure reading, monitoring and joint analysis of televiewing, deferral of immediate gratifications to accomplish long-term goals, expressions of affection and interest in children's academic and personal growth . . . ." (Walberg, 1984, p. 400).

Joyce L. Epstein (1987) reiterated the idea that schools should take the initiative in procuring parent participation in the child's schooling. Epstein masterfully summarized the research connecting parent involvement to effective education. She then set down specific actions that administrators, particularly principals, could take to enhance parent participation. "Administrators can help teachers successfully involve parents by coordinating, managing, supporting, funding, and recognizing parent involvement" (Epstein, 1987, p. 133).

Programs to "involve" parents proliferated during the 1980s, seeking to improve student learning by bolstering the curriculum of the home, and engaging parents in the educational development of their children. James Comer, Dorothy Rich, and Joyce Epstein were among the education leaders who provided practical transitions from research to implementation. A meta-analysis by Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1993) found home and community influences among the strongest contributors to academic attainment. Especially powerful were the influences of the family – the daily patterns of family life that encouraged learning and schoolwork. Various studies amplified this message by asserting its validity in particular settings and for specific school populations. Yap and Enoki (1995), for example, studied the effects of parental involvement efforts on the academic achievement of Chapter 1 students in Hawaii and concluded that parent programs that focused on involvement in the instructional process, increased home-based parental activities to reinforce student learning, and raised literacy skills of parents most directly impacted learning outcomes.

The particular family behaviors that contribute to school learning can be neatly summarized; they surround the activities of reading (including parent-child discussion of reading), parent-child discussions of school and learning, homework and other study at home, and expectations, structures and routines regarding work, punctuality, and daily living (Davé, 1963). For some families, these behaviors come naturally; for others, they may be learned and adopted. The school, properly perceived as a community, can take the lead in making clear the kind of home environment that best supports school learning and providing support for parents who wish to align their family life with these behavioral correlates with school success.

Despite a plethora of evidence that the home environment directly and powerfully affects school performance, and substantial, research-based programmatic efforts to improve home environments in ways that will benefit children's learning, results have often been disappointing. Recent studies and hypotheses have pointed to mutations in traditional family structures as a reason for the intractability of home environments. David Blankenhorn (1995), for example, specifically targets the absence of fathers from family life – through higher divorce rates, dramatically increased numbers of out-of-wedlock births, and neglect – as a change in family make-up that has produced a number of social ills, including greater challenges to schools.

Dana Mack draws upon the societal critique to explain pressures on families that make their attention to the advantageous patterns of behavior difficult: "... parents see the decline of social supports and the breakdown of families as symptoms of a larger phenomenon: the sudden and rapid decay of those stable social values that once fostered a protective culture of childhood" (Mack, 1997, p. 17). This unhinging of culture is reminiscent of Reisman's description of the shift away from a tradition-directed context for childrearing.

Thomas Lickona sees the same hamstringing of the family by larger forces at work in society, and singles out the school as the institution most likely to rectify the resulting loss to children. "Escalating moral problems in society – ranging from greed and dishonesty to violent crime to self-destructive behaviors such as drug abuse and suicide – are bringing about a new consensus. Now, from all across the country, from private citizens and public organizations, from liberals and conservatives alike, comes a summons to the schools: Take up the role of moral teachers of our children" (Lickona, 1991, p. 4-5). The school, then, is charged not only with the task of improving the home environment by influencing and educating parents, but with supplanting (or at least heavily supplementing) the home as a purveyor of morality and civil behavior.

Building Community In Schools

We return to Clifford W. Cobb to make the case for community in schools: "An effective school has to be a community in which personal relationships based on trust outweigh impersonal rules. A community based on shared vision and close personal interactions is not a frill; it is a necessity" (Cobb, 1991, p. 23). Cobb's placement of community in opposition to "impersonal rules" is a slap at the managerial and bureaucratic operation of public schools.

Sergiovanni amplifies Putnam's condemnation of the corrosive effects of social norms that emphasize individualism at the expense of more altruistic commitments. He also echoes Cobb's assertion that school must be a place of community (without, however, endorsing Cobb's insistence that effective associations must be voluntary – an argument that supports school vouchers). Sergiovanni's school community is bound by shared values, requiring that its constituents engage in processes to articulate, define, and refine their educational values.

A special contribution of a school community from Coleman's perspective is the possibility of achieving intergenerational closure (1990). When the adults who care about a group of children are themselves not in association with one another, as is typically the occasion in modern society, the children's influence on one another is heightened and intergenerational transmission of the culture is stymied. As a practical example, it is common for children to sit next to each other in a classroom each day for several hours, week after week, and month after month, and for the parents of those children to have no association with one another apart from the school and little contact with one another in connection with the school. In fact, these adults may not know one another, even though their children are growing up together and strongly impacting each other's lives. A school community would draw parents into greater contact with each other, achieving an intergenerational closure. The benefits are twofold: 1) children are known by, cared for, and watched out for by a larger number of adults, and 2) parents of a group of children maintain communication among themselves, sharing standards, norms, and experiences of childrearing.

Paul J. Baker (1991) sees a school community as a microcosm of the community at large, incorporating four familiar institutions: a) the firm (the discipline of a production system with highly-skilled workers), b) the family (a caring and supportive group of adults who care about the children and children who respect the adults), c) the fair (members of the school community coming together to celebrate their best work), and d) the forum (a public meeting place encouraging informed dialogue and intellectual inquiry). Along with this reflection of familiar institutions is a broadening of the context of learning beyond the schoolhouse doors. "Reading should not be limited to individual pursuits of students performing daily assignments according to routine classroom schedules. Reading needs a broader social context offering endless opportunities for shared learning among students, parents, and teachers" (Baker & Moss, 1993, p. 24).

Academic and Social Competence

Research has identified key competencies of resilient children, including social and intellectual competence, realistic goal setting, planning, and resourcefulness. These are not innate traits, nor are they acquired only inferentially. They are abilities that can be taught and learned within the contexts of family, school, and community (Wang, Haertel & Walberg, 1997). The Alliance for Achievement process for building school communities (Redding, 1990) was developed first in inner-city Chicago schools to provide a larger context for children to acquire academic and social skills. This larger context was described as a school community, where the people intimately attached to a school – teachers, staff, students, and families of students – share goals for the academic and social learning of children, and communicate and associate with one another in furtherance of their shared educational goals (Redding, 1996). The inclusion in Alliance for Achievement of social learning (or character development) alongside a focus on the building blocks of academic learning, such as reading and study habits, relied upon research demonstrating especially the influence of the home on school learning (Davé, 1963; Walberg, 1984; Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez & Bloom, 1993) and the necessity of including social learning as a goal of the school-home nexus (Weissberg, et al., 1991, 1997).

To enhance academic and social learning within a "community" context, the school first identifies specific, alterable behaviors by parents, teachers and students that affect learning and then seeks to use the attributes of community – face-to-face association, trust, obligations, and expectations – to encourage members of the community to behave in the desired manner. Etzioni (1991) and Sergiovanni (1994) have written extensively on the community's reliance upon communication, education, and persuasion to mold behaviors, as opposed to the less-effective (often counterproductive) modes of behavioral control typically employed by a bureaucratic organization. People who share an interest in a common group of children and take the time to associate with one another to share norms, standards, and experiences of raising and educating children will become a community. A community of this type will provide an environment conducive to the learning and social development of all children.

Common Experience

When we think back to childhood, recalling experiences that best define our family, we most likely conjure up images of dinner-table conversation; the nudging, squirming, laughing, and bickering in a vacation-bound car; Sunday mornings linked together in a church pew; dark hours huddled around a sick-bed; holiday routines; or Friday nights with popcorn and television and dim lights in a warm room. We think of the ritualistic experiences that drew all members of the family together. We think of our common experiences.

Every group of people defines itself in much the same way, through junctures in time and place that are overlaid with special purpose. Groups are defined by what they hold in common and are strengthened by shared memories.

In the one-room, country schoolhouse, the entire educational experience was "common." One teacher taught one curriculum, and students progressed through the curriculum by virtue of mastering its content. Older children tutored younger children in the work they had themselves previously mastered. Everyone paused for lunch at the same time and sledded together at recess on the slope outside the back door. As rooms were added to the school, children were divided by age and moved by lock-step progression through the grade levels. The common experience of the school was replaced by the common experience of the classroom. Unlike the one-room school, the class was segregated by age and sometimes by gender or ability.

To the extent that the teachers of various grade levels remained in touch with one another, the curriculum remained "common," even if students were now divided. When enrollments grew and each grade level required more than one teacher, another level of disconnection resulted. The third-grade teacher now needed to be in communication with the second- and fourth-grade teachers as well as other third-grade teachers. Then some teachers began to specialize in subject areas, so that one teacher now taught science and another taught reading. Further separation. As schools recognized that some children were falling behind the lock-step, they created multi-track systems that lowered standards for slow children. The slowest children were often "pulled out" of the regular classroom for work with a remedial teacher. When schools noticed that brighter students sat bored much of the time, these students were "pulled out" for enrichment courses that often had little to do with a child's progression through the basic curriculum. So, instead of moving the bright third-grader into fourth-grade mathematics, the gifted program taught the child to make papier-maché dinosaurs or solve brainteasers, adding yet another dimension to the curriculum. Rather than charting individual paths through a common curriculum, the curriculum and its tests of mastery were fractured.

But how can a school maintain the same standards for all children when children vary markedly in their ability to learn? Doesn't the school, in fact, need more individualization, more differentiation of curricula, more tracking of students into homogeneous groups? The answer to these questions is twofold: (1) There is little evidence that tracking results in greater learning (see Oakes, 1985); and (2) Differences in student ability are best addressed, not by varying standards, but by varying levels of support and amounts of time devoted to meeting the standards (see Bloom, 1976).

Restoring Connections in the Modern School

Many schools are now seeking ways to reconnect elements of the school that have grown apart. Instructional alignment and criterion-based tests are two of the tools they are using. Instructional alignment is an effort to align desired outcomes with measures of proficiency, curricular content, and methods of instruction; in aligning instruction, schools weave together webs of connection from class to class and grade level to grade level. Criterion-based tests help by establishing benchmarks for mastery. At their best, criterion-based tests establish a common curriculum – each tested criterion is a learning objective. But tests of mastery are the third step in unifying a curriculum. The first step is to ask the difficult question, "What do we expect children to know and do?" This is the question of value in education. Once we have determined what we value, what we want children to know and do, we order these elements of knowledge and skill into logical sequences. Then we move to the second step – planning various instructional routes to enable children to come to know and do. And finally, we ask the question, "How do we know when the child has mastered the objective?" At this step, a test is created, linking each test item to an original "know" or "do" objective.

By test, we need not think only in terms of pencil and paper exams. Especially, we need not think only in terms of the typical multiple-choice tests that assess a child's ability to recall facts. A criterion-based test could be a portfolio of work that demonstrates a child's mastery. It could be an oral examination or recitation. It could be a project. But it must be explicitly connected to the original element of "knowing" or "doing" that we value.

Studies of productivity in education seek to "identify variables in the learning process that have the highest potential pay-off for improving student achievement" (Parkerson, et al., 1984, p. 638). Productivity is the ratio of cost to outcome, and outcome is usually measured with achievement tests. Productivity analyses presume that knowledge and skill measured by achievement tests are the most valuable aims of schooling. Questions of productivity address the efficiencies of a system of education. They do not necessarily probe matters of educational value. Questions of educational value seek assurance that we are efficiently teaching children to know and do the right things. Arriving at a consensus on the "right things" for students to know and do is a vital part of reconnecting disparate components of the school experience.

School-Wide Instructional Strategies

In the "stand and deliver" days, the teacher directly taught children to know something, then each child stood before the class to demonstrate that he or she had indeed mastered this bit of learning. The teacher received an immediate understanding of how well each student had mastered the material. Classroom recitation, in its most primitive form, was a brutal way to expose slower students to embarrassment. But modifications of this approach, combined with Socratic inquiry, bring a classroom alive with a think-learn-show cycle. THINK: The teacher asks probing questions or sets up a line of inquiry by piquing the students' curiosity. LEARN: Then a new set of facts or concepts is introduced or is distilled from the conversation. SHOW: Next children are asked to demonstrate their grasp of these new facts or concepts. Their first demonstration of mastery comes by way of their participation in the dialogue of the classroom, which also gives the teacher immediate feedback on the success of her approach. If children are not grasping the information, a new tack can be taken.

One new tack is to introduce a cooperative learning exercise. Children can be grouped to help one another learn. This form of heterogenous grouping places children of differing learning speeds together, so that the faster students can assist the slower students and have their own learning reinforced in the process. Some children may require additional time with the concept; children learn at different speeds. Ultimately, each child must demonstrate his or her understanding through verbal response, written response, or completion of a project or assignment. This final demonstration is the test of the child's mastery of the objective (criterion) to which the test was originally linked.

The think-learn-show cycle incorporates the value-based, teacher-directed approach of direct instruction. It allows for cooperative learning experiences. It provides varied paths to understanding and flexible amounts of time that are the key principles of mastery learning. When this instructional process is matched to a coherent, connected curriculum and criterion-referenced tests, the school's learning experience becomes one giant common experience for its students. Grade level to grade level, classroom to classroom, teacher to teacher, a consistent instructional strategy, such as think-learn-show, forms a unifying, school-wide common experience. Much that was good about the one-room schoolhouse is reconstructed by adopting a school-wide instructional strategy and training teachers in its application.

Most teachers would read this description of think-learn-show and this rudimentary explication of direct instruction, cooperative learning, and mastery learning and conclude that this is what every teacher does every day. So where's the beef? What more is needed to make everyday instruction an effective common experience? What is needed is coordination, integration, and alignment of the curriculum, instruction, and assessment across grade levels and from classroom to classroom. This requires time for planning and coordination that most school schedules do not allow. It also requires a great deal of organization and information processing that computers only now make feasible.

Computers can reconnect the school in ways that make the one-room schoolhouse an apt analogy. They make instructional alignment and criterion-based testing manageable. They also help individualize learning paths and analyze student-learning data. Placing computers in schools, however, has little effect in unifying the curriculum if more time is not provided for teachers to meet. Placing computers in schools is of little constructive consequence if the computers merely divide students further by sorting them into isolated workstations within classrooms that have already sorted children by age and possibly by ability. The more computers are able to bring coherence to the curriculum, the more teachers will need time together and students will need cooperative experiences. Association of people is the counterbalance to the isolating tendencies that come with computer efficiencies.

School-Level Decision-Making

Common experience for a school presupposes school-level decision-making. Two complementary traditions in American education run contrary to school-level decision-making: a political bureaucracy that emanates from the state and projects downward through the school district to the school, and the insular autonomy of each classroom cell within the school. These traditions are complementary because by robbing teachers of a strong voice in the operation of the school, the centralized bureaucracy encourages teachers to hang on to the sole province of their authority – the classroom.

Teachers are not the only ones deprived of school-level power in the centralized system; parents are given little formal function in school-level decision-making and thus demonstrate the behavior of a disenfranchised constituency. They are either completely detached from the school or frantically agitated in protest. The most optimistic among them cling jealously to the small corner of influence found in parent-teacher organizations and fundraising committees. Both detachment and agitation are the results of frustration with formal structures that allow parents little significant role in a system dominated by certified experts and bureaucratic regulation.

Lest we assume that the principal holds the reins of authority in the traditional school system, we must consider the drastically proscribed turf of decision-making reserved for the principal. The principal is the bureaucracy's functionary in the school, the rule-keeper, bean-counter, and master of protocol. Without mechanisms for shared, school-level decision-making, a principal can only break from the mundane tasks of mid-management by donning the armor of rogue knight, a position ultimately as futile as that of the bureaucratic headdrone.

With school-level decision-making, everyone in the school gains in power and influence. To achieve this new power, however, everyone in the school must first sacrifice smaller but more secure fiefdoms. The teachers must give up autonomy of their classrooms; the parents must disavow the comfort of detachment and the self-gratifying rancor of complaint unfettered by responsibility; and the principal must relinquish the mantle of bureaucracy's low priest or the silver bullet of education's lone ranger.

Shared decision-making does not mean that everyone shares in every decision. Expertise rightfully carries its privilege, and authority must be assigned in equal proportion to responsibility. The art of shared decision-making is in designing internal structures and procedures that include the right people in the right decisions, provide for representation of significant constituencies, and foster a sense of ownership on the part of administrators, staff, teachers, parents, and students.

Edward B. Fiske, in his book, *Smart Schools, Smart Kids,* says that "decentralization brings a sea change" (1991, p. 51). Old ways, the habits of a lifetime, and manners of thinking are overturned. Filling the void requires training, talking, planning, and patience. "Shared decision-making is clearly no panacea. . . . Its significance for the overhauling of American public education lies not in what it guarantees but in what it makes possible" (Fiske, 1991, p. 61). Among the possibilities created by shared decision-making are common educational experiences, the defining touchstones of effective schooling.

School-Wide Ritual and Tradition

When we think of school tradition, we usually think of team nicknames, mascots, team colors, fight songs, pep rallies, cheerleaders, pom pons, and marching bands. Athletic events come to mind because they are among the very few experiences that students in a school hold in common. All students, regardless of age, grade level, gender, or academic performance, rise to sing the same fight song, call the same colors their own, and cheer for the same team. Can we say the same for any element of the academic program? Probably not. It would be healthy to infuse the academic program with the enthusiasm that ritual and tradition generate in the athletic sphere. Certain experiences rooted in the educational values of a school community could be common to all students in a school.

Raster Elementary School in Chicago has attempted to wed tradition to the school community's educational value of reading. The school holds an annual "reading pep rally" with cheerleaders firing up the assembled student body with chants attesting to the virtues of reading. Students perform skits from their favorite books. The rally launches a school-wide reading frenzy with awards presented to students for reading certain numbers of books. The halls are decorated with book reports and drawings of themes from books.

At Kingston School in Kingston, Illinois, every student in the school learns the principles of debate. The students then attend an assembly at which members of the Northern Illinois University debate team engage in an intramural contest, explaining the techniques of debating. Finally, the students enter into debates with one another, leading to winning debaters. But the process does not stop there. The winning debaters take on parents before an all-school assembly. The topics of the debate with parents are typical areas of family disagreement, such as bedtime hours. In this debate, the students argue the side that parents would usually take and parents argue the side that students would typically argue. The fervor generated over this school-wide exercise in communication and critical thinking is similar to that found at homecoming football games.

At Peirce Elementary School in Chicago, every student in the school is expected to complete homework, to arrive for school on time, and to attend school regularly. When students meet these high standards, they are awarded Peirce Bucks—play money exchangeable for goodies at the school store. Harris Bank supports the common experience with plenty of goodies.

All students at Northwest Elementary School in LaSalle, Illinois, receive and use assignment notebooks to record their daily assignments. Students at each grade level read a common set of books that are incorporated into the lessons of every teacher. These are traditional, school-wide, value-based common experiences.

Every school has a name, and every school name provides opportunities for common educational experiences. One would expect that the students at Lincoln School would be experts on the life of Abraham Lincoln and that Lincoln themes would run through their every activity. Davis Elementary School in Chicago was named for the founder of the American Medical Association, and Davis's school community council has selected "a healthy mind and body" as one of its goals for every student. The school ties this goal to the special identity of its namesake, promoting school-wide activities on health and the medical profession.

Riverton Middle School in Riverton, Illinois, organizes all of its students and teachers and parent volunteers into a community clean-up corps on Responsibility Day. Students comb the town for debris, filling garbage bags and scrubbing the town clean. Townspeople watch in appreciation as young people share this common experience while learning the meaning of environmental responsibility.

At Alcott Elementary School in Chicago, students decorate the hall with their own versions of what Michael Jordan might say about decency. They practice courteous behavior, demonstrating their respect for each other in a week-long celebration of good manners and thoughtfulness. A rousing assembly caps the week.

At Chicago's Darwin Elementary School, one day each year is given to guest readers. Celebrities, parents, and community members come to school to read their favorite books to students. The entire school participates in this traditional celebration of reading.

Every school team can be identified by its colors, its nickname, and its mascot. Every school also holds the seeds of exciting traditions and rituals related to its educational values. A little imagination is all that is required.

Common Experience and Association

A school community, as opposed to a school operating with the traditional structures of administrative hierarchy, teacher autonomy, and parental detachment, is ideally poised to establish a cohesive, unified curriculum and to employ teaching methods that are conducive to common experience. Schools in the Alliance for Achievement Network build school communities through a process that includes six components. Two of these components are "common experience" and "association." Common experience, in the Alliance model, is achieved by connecting the elements of the school program. Common experience is a bias against the tendencies in schools to divide and separate children, to lower standards and expectations for some students, and to tolerate a curriculum that is disjointed – unattached to values of education, practices of instruction, or the measures of outcome. Of course some division and separation is necessary, but a school community is cautious in dividing children, seeking instead to find programs, policies, and activities that are inclusive. Common educational experience is a tendency toward connection rather than separation; it is a predilection for common standards, common curriculum, and common expectations for all students. It is the glue of school community, the central, unifying core that defines the character of a specific school community.

The concepts of association and common experience are easily confused because both deal with connections. In association, people are connected; in a common experience, elements of school policy or program are connected and made applicable to all students. Association means face-to-face interaction of people for purposes related to the educational values of the school community. Common experience means unity of policies, standards, practices, programs, or activities for all students. Common experience also means explicit connection of the intentions, practices, and outcomes of the school program.

A school may adopt a policy that all students will read aloud each school day. This common educational experience may be achieved in a variety of ways, some of which may lend themselves to associations of otherwise unconnected school community members. Perhaps the students in one class read to each other; in another class students may read to surrogate parents; at another time, older students may read to students in a lower grade. Each of these applications of a common policy is an opportunity for association.

Not all common experiences produce associations. One school in the Alliance for Achievement Network implemented a Homework Honor Roll, a policy whose standards applied to all children in the school. All students, regardless of grade level or ability, received homework assignments. All students who completed all of their homework assignments were recognized on the Homework Honor Roll. Their names were displayed on a bulletin board in the central hallway. This common policy involved no association but it defined a special feature of this particular school—homework was important, everybody received homework assignments, and every student who completed all of his or her assignments for the week was recognized on the Homework Honor Roll.

Another Alliance school, Bell Elementary School in Chicago, serves as an attendance center for deaf children, a magnet school for gifted children, and a neighborhood school for all children who reside within its proximity. The school community council at Bell decided that all children in the school should learn sign language. The teachers of the deaf children developed a curriculum to teach sign language to all children in the school, a common experience that unified a diverse student body and helped define the special character of the school. In learning sign language, new associations were also encouraged. Deaf children now conversed with children from the gifted program and children in the neighborhood school using the common language they had acquired. Teachers of hearing children learned the special communication tool of their colleagues who taught hearing-impaired children. At Bell School, a common experience fostered association of children who otherwise were often separated.

Types of Common Experience

A common experience includes or involves all students in a school and is related to one or more educational values of the school community. The common experience may be the result of a policy, a program, an event, an instructional strategy, or a curricular thread. Examples include:

Common Experience as Policy

- At our school, all students receive homework assignments.
- At our school, everyone "drops everything" to read a book at 10:00 every Tuesday and Thursday.

Common Experience as Event

- At our school, all students participate in Courtesy Week.
- At our school, all students participate in Guest Reader Day.

Common Experience as School-wide Instructional Strategy

- At our school, all teachers are trained in and use the think-learn-show method.
- At our school, all teachers assist students with their assignment notebooks.

Common Experience as Curricular Thread

- At our school, all students read the same body of books and every teacher incorporates these books into their lessons.
- At our school, all students progress through a common math curriculum, moving at individual paces determined by their mastery.

The common experience component of the Alliance for Achievement model is one way to make connections in a school community. Making connections in schools also includes:

1. Greater school-level decision-making,
2. Mechanisms to arrive at a consensus as to educational values, the specific aims of education – what children should know and do,
3. Time for teachers to meet to articulate curricular and instructional strategies,
4. Replacing the lock-step progression of students through grade levels with progression based on mastery,
5. Integrating students across age and ability levels,
6. Employing cooperative learning and other strategies that bring students together,
7. Adopting school-wide instructional strategies, and
8. Creating school-wide ritual and tradition related to educational values and themes.

School improvement initiatives invariably begin with a process through which the school seeks common ground and a sense of central purpose. Someone adopts a mission statement. Or a vision statement. Then a plan is developed that flows from the statement of central purpose. Promoting common experience in a school is a behavioral extension of the verbal task of adopting mission statements. Common experiences define the meaning, the distinct character, and the central purpose of a school community. They also become the memories that define for adults what it meant to be a student at a particular school.

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How My Immigrant Experience Shaped My Work with Families and Schools

Dorothy Rich

We lived in the small town of Monroe, Michigan, with a population under 20,000. My parents were immigrants who spoke little English, and I went to the public school down the street. I was not different from many children of immigrants today who are struggling just to make it and to be accepted into America. My own history may be a major factor in the curricula I develop for families and the immediate appeal it has for today's immigrants. I hadn't realized the connection until I was in a meeting with Hispanic parents, discussing their children. I said to them, "I, too, am a child of immigrants. What you want for your children, my parents wanted for me." In Florida and California, the vast majority of families participating in our MegaSkills® school/home programs are Hispanic. This set me thinking about what I may have forgotten about my own school experiences as a child of immigrants.

My mother signed my report cards. I saved some of those cards, and I see her signature still. It was difficult for her to write in English. Yet there was no question about the report cards or their importance. It was impressed on me over and over that I was supposed to work hard and get high grades.

I'm not sure how other children of immigrants feel, but I know that it wasn't easy being "different." Monroe in the 1930's and 1940's was a white bread town—everyone was white and everyone spoke English. Foreigners were tolerated, (there weren't many of us) but we were still foreign. And I was a child of foreigners.

My parents had pronounced accents when they spoke English. They often spoke together in Yiddish, not just so the children wouldn't understand, but also because it was more comfortable for them. I hate to admit this, but it is true that I often felt ashamed of their accent and their foreign mannerisms.

This essay is previously unpublished.

That made me different, too, and if there is one thing children don't want to be, it's different.

My differences, while they hurt at the time, have been a source of strength for me as I have gone through life. I thank my father and his immigrant drive for much of what I have been able to accomplish. I was a girl at a time when girls were supposed to get married, raise a family, settle down and not really do very much on their own outside the home.

My father did not have a lot of parenting experience. My mother died when I was 13, and it was not an easy time. My father worked over twelve hours a day six days a week in his photography studio just to make a living. I have a brother who is four years older, and both of us had depended on our mother for all the parenting we received. She provided lots of it, and then she was gone.

The culture of the school was different from the culture of my immigrant home. The school was a "cool" sanctuary compared to the "heat" of my home. At home, feelings were intense and emotions often boiled over. The school was traditional and established; it had confident, set rules and schedules. The teachers in those days were not quite gods, but almost. It was impossible for me not to be in awe of school. I'd go home reminding and admonishing my "greenhorn" parents that this was or was not "the way" things had to be done. This is what the teacher says. The teacher was the authority. The school in its workings was a mysterious, omnipotent place, a powerful force that determines the present and the future. I was frightened of it, and yet I wanted to understand it.

It wasn't all that clear or obvious to me then, but maybe this is the reason I wanted to become a teacher – to gain through teaching that sense of being in charge, of knowing how things worked, a sense that I didn't feel as a student in school or as a child at home. Maybe this is why I have spent so much time figuring out, writing, and talking about what parents and teachers need to know about each other and about how to decipher the mysterious workings of the school.

Unlike parents today, parents back then did not receive tips about what to ask and what to say at parent-teacher conferences. Nobody told them about school policies, and compacts, and annual plans. There was little if any connection between school and home. Teachers did their thing, and parents did theirs. It was really not until I became a parent as well as a teacher that I began to understand the importance of connecting the work of the school with the work of the home. It became increasingly clear to me that so much was happening in both places affecting children's success. It seemed right for me to find ways to make the school more open and less mysterious, to build a synergy of effort between the significant adults in children's lives.

More and more, I am convinced that my own immigrant experience is the bedrock of the work of the Home and School Institute. I want to pass on what

I have learned, so that other immigrants can come to know and understand schools. I do not speak the language of many families using my programs, but it is clear from their response that we both speak the language of immigrant aspirations for children. Immigrants travel a long way to go to school. The cross miles and cultural divides. This voyage and their desire to learn are enormous strengths. Many immigrants are scared; I was. Many are often needy and unready in the traditional sense; I was, too. Yet many if not most immigrant learners come searching, knowing that they have a vital need to "know." These are opportune moments, brief periods that can pass quickly. That is why schools must build on and work to preserve immigrant learning strengths and drives, through a strong partnership with the home.

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The Politics of Virtue: A New Compact for Leadership in Schools

Thomas J. Sergiovanni

Margeret Mead once remarked: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." Her thought suggests that perhaps there is something to the 1,000 points of light theory of change. Is it possible to rally enough small groups of thoughtful and committed "citizens" to create the kind of schools we want? I think so, if we are willing to change the way politics is thought about in schools.

Rarely does a day go by without the media telling us still another story of divisions, hostilities, factions, and other symptoms of disconnectedness in schools. Teachers disagreeing over methods; parents bickering with teachers over discipline problems; board members squabbling over curriculum issues; administrators complaining about encroachments on their prerogatives; everyone disagreeing on sex education; and students, feeling pretty much left out of it all, making it difficult for everyone in the school by tediously trading their compliance and good will for things that they want. This mixture of issues and this mixture of "stakeholders," all competing for advantage, resembles a game of bartering where self-interest is the motivator, and where individual actors engage in the hard play of the politics of division. The purpose of this game is to win more for yourself than you have to give back in return. Graham Allison (1969) summarizes the game of *politics of division* as follows:

> Actions emerge neither as the calculated choice of a unified group nor as a formal summary of a leader's preferences. Rather the context of shared power but separate judgement concerning important choices determines that politics is the mechanism of choice. Note the *environment* in which the

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> game is played: inordinate uncertainty about what must be done, the necessity that something be done and crucial consequences of whatever is done. These features force responsible men to become active players. The *pace of the game*—hundreds of issues, numerous games, and multiple channels—compels players to fight to "get others' attention," to make them "see the facts," to assure that they "take the time to think seriously about the broader issue." The *structure of the game*—power shared by individuals with separate responsibilities—validates each player's feeling that "others don't see my problem," and "others must be persuaded to look at the issue from a less parochial perspective." The *rules of the game*—he who hesitates loses his chance to play at that point, and he who is uncertain about his recommendation is overpowered by others who are sure—pressures players to come down on the side of a 51-49 issue and play. The *rewards of the game*—effectiveness, i.e., impact on outcomes, as the immediate measure of performance—encourages hard play" (p. 710).

The politics of division is a consequence of applying formal organization theories of governance, management, and leadership to schools. At root these theories assume that human nature is motivated by self-interest, and that leadership requires the bartering of need fulfillment for compliance. Would things be different if we applied community theories instead? Communities, too, "play the game" of politics. But it is a different game. It is a game of politics more like that envisioned by James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, Thomas Jefferson, and other American Founders and enshrined in such sacred documents as the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, and the amendments to that constitution that represents a bill of rights and a bill of responsibilities for all Americans. It is a game called the politics of virtue—a politics motivated by shared commitment to the common good and guided by protections that ensure the rights and responsibilities of individuals.

Civic Virtue

Is it possible to replace the politics of division with a politics of virtue? I think so if we are willing to replace the values that have been borrowed from the world of formal organizations with traditional democratic values that encourage a commitment to civic virtue. This would entail development and use of different theories of human nature and leadership. For example, the rational choice theories of human nature we now use will need to be replaced

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with a normative and moral theory of human nature. And, the executive images of leadership that we now rely upon will need to be replaced with collegial images aimed at problem-solving and ministering.

Creating a politics of virtue requires that we renew commitments to the democratic legacy that gave birth to our country. This is the legacy that can provide the foundation for leadership in schools. The American Founders had in mind the creation of a covenantal polity within which: "The body is one but has many members. There can be unity with diversity. . . . The great challenge was to create a political body that brought people together and created a 'we' but still enabled people to separate themselves and recognize and respect one another's individualities. This remains the great challenge for all modern democracies" (Elshtain, 1994, p. 9). The cultivation of commitment to civic virtue is a key part of this challenge.

During the debate over passing the constitution of 1787, America was faced with a choice between two conceptions of politics: *republican* and *pluralist*. In republican politics civic virtue was considered to be the cornerstone principle—the prerequisite for the newly-proposed government to work. Civic virtue was embodied in the willingness of citizens to subordinate their own private interests to the general good (see for example Sunstein, 1994), and was therefore the basis for creating a politics of virtue. This politics of virtue emphasized self-rule by the people, but not the imposition of their private preferences on the new government. Instead, preferences were to be developed and shaped by the people themselves for the benefit of the common good.

Haefele (1993) believes that it is easier to provide examples of how civic virtue is expressed than to try to define it with precision. In his words:

> It is fashionable nowadays for both the left and the right to decry the loss of civic virtue; the left on such issues as industry rape of the environment and the right because of the loss of patriotism. Both sides are undoubtedly right, as civic virtue belongs to no single party or creed. It is simply a quality of caring about public purposes and public destinations. Sometimes the public purpose is chosen over private purposes. A young Israeli economist investigating a Kibbutz came across the following case. The Kibbutz had money to spend. The alternatives were a TV antennae and TV sets for everyone or a community meeting hall. The economist found that everyone preferred the TV option but that, when they voted, they unanimously chose the meeting hall. Call it enlightened self-interest, a community preference or something else, it is civic virtue in action (p. 211).

When the republican conception of politics is applied to schools, both the unique shared values that define individual schools as communities, and our common democratic principles and conceptions of goodness that provide the basis for defining civic virtue are important.

The pluralist conception of politics differs from the republican. Without the unifying power of civic virtue, factions are strengthened and the politics of division reigns. In the ideal, the challenge of this politics is to play people and events in a way that the self-interests of individuals and factions are mediated in some orderly manner. "Under the pluralist conception, people come to the political process with pre-selected interests that they seek to promote through political conflict and compromise" (Sunstein, 1993, p. 176). Deliberate governmental processes of conflict resolution and compromise, of checks and balances, are needed in the pluralist view because preferences are not shaped by the people themselves as they strive to control self-interests that happen to dominate at the time.

Civic virtue was important to both Federalists, who supported the proposed constitution, and Anti-Federalists, who opposed the constitution, though it was the centerpiece of Anti-Federalist thinking. The Anti-Federalists favored decentralization in the form of democracy tempered by a commitment to the common good. The Federalists, by contrast, acknowledged the importance of civic virtue, but felt the pull of pluralistic politics was too strong for the embodiment of virtue to be left to chance. They proposed a representative rather than a direct form of government that would be guided by the principles of a formal constitution that specified a series of governmental checks and balances to control factionalism and self-interest.

Both the positions of the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists have roles to play in the governance of schools. In small communities, for example, the politics of virtue expressed within a direct democracy that is guided by *citizen* devotion to the public good seems to make the most sense. Small schools and small schools within schools would be examples of such communities. They would be governed by autonomous school councils that are responsible for both educational policy and site-based management—both ends and means. This approach to governance represents a significant departure from present policies that allow principals, parents, and teachers in local schools to decide how they will do things, but not what they will do. The decisions that local school councils make would be guided by shared values and beliefs that parents, teachers, and students develop together. Schools, in this image, would not function as markets where self-interests reign or bureaucracies where entrenched rule systems reign, but as morally-based direct democracies within which parents, teachers, and students, guided by civic virtue, make the best decisions possible for learning.

At the school district level, by contrast, the position of the Federalists might make the most sense. A representative form of government spearheaded by elected school boards guided by an explicit constitution that contains the protections and freedoms needed to enable individual school communities to function both responsibly and autonomously, would be the model. School communities would have to abide by certain school district regulations regarding safety, due process, equity, fiscal procedures, and a few basic academic standards. But beyond these, schools would be free to decide for themselves not only their management processes, but their policy structures as well. They would be responsible for deciding their own educational purposes, their own educational programs, their own scheduling and ways of operating, and their own means to demonstrate to the school district and to the public that they are functioning responsibly. Accountability in such a system would be both responsive to each school's purposes and, in light of those purposes, to tough standards of proof.

How can schools be held accountable for different standards? First we will need to create standards for standards. Then we will be able to assess whether the standards that individual schools set for themselves are good ones. Once standards are accepted, each school is then assessed on its own terms. Here is how such a strategy would work: Schools make promises to the people; the promises must be good ones; school boards and states hold schools accountable for keeping their promises.

The Rational Choice Question

Formal organization theories of human nature can be traced back to a few principles that are at the center of classical economic theory. Prime among them is the *utility function* which is believed to explain all consumer behavior. The reasoning behind this belief is as follows: humans are by their nature selfish. They are driven by a desire to maximize their self-interests and thus continually calculate the costs and benefits of their actions. They choose courses of action that either make them winners (they get a desired payoff) or keep them from losing (they avoid penalties). So dominant is this view and so pervasive is the concept of utility function that emotions such as love, loyalty, obligation, sense of duty, belief in goodness, commitment to a cause, and a desire to help make things better are thought to count very little in determining the courses of actions that humans choose. This view of human nature comprises a model of economics called Rational Choice Theory.

Rational Choice Theory, expressed simply as "What gets rewarded gets done," undergirds much of the thinking in schools about how to motivate teachers to perform, how to introduce school improvement initiatives in schools, how to motivate people to accept change, and how to motivate students to learn and to behave. By emphasizing self-interest, Rational Choice Theory discourages the development of civic virtue.

Two additional motivational rules need to be recognized if we are to have a more complete picture of human nature: "What is *rewarding* gets done," and "What people value and believe in gets done." Both rules compel people to perform, to improve, to change, and to meet their commitments from within even if doing so requires that self-interest be sacrificed. Both rules address the intrinsic and moral nature of human nature. Both rules are essential to the cultivation of civic virtue.

Is Civic Virtue for Students, Too?

Some readers might concede that perhaps we should move away from a rational choice view of motivation. Perhaps we should acknowledge the capacity of parents and teachers to respond less in terms of their self-interest, and more in terms of what they believe is right and good. But what about students? Can they too respond to the call of virtue?

Children and young adults in schools have different needs and different dispositions. They function developmentally at different levels of moral reasoning than do adults. But the evidence is clear that students from kindergarten to grade twelve have the capacity to understand what civic virtue is and have the capacity to respond to it in ways that are consistent with their own levels of maturation.

Rose Reissman (1993) and several other teachers in New York City's District 25, for example , have been working with elementary school children (even first and second graders) on developing "bills of responsibilities." The bills are designed to teach the meaning of civic virtue, and to introduce students to sources of authority that are more morally based than the usual behavioristic ways to get students to do things. Key is the emphasis on reciprocal responsibilities—a critical ingredient in community building. Communities of mind, for example, evolve from commitments to standards that apply to everyone in the school, not just to students. Thus if students must be respectful, so must parents, teachers, principals, and everyone else who is a member of the school community, or who visits the school.

Recent events at the Harmony School in Bloomington, Indiana, illustrate civic virtue in action (Panasonic Foundation, Inc., 1994). A well known sculptor had removed his limestone rhinoceros from its place in front of an art gallery in Bloomington to keep it from being vandalized. The kindergarten-through-twelfth-grade students at the Harmony School launched a campaign to return the rhino to Bloomington . They raised $6,000 and purchased the rhino which now stands in front of the school for the entire community to enjoy.

In 1993, Harmony High School students decided that instead of the traditional field trip to Chicago, they would go to Quincy, Illinois, where the Mississippi floods had devastated the city. One of the students explained, "They have plenty of food, and plenty of relief supplies, but they don't have anybody to help get life in order." Harmony students helped by clearing mud, garbage and debris from the streets, and by planting flowers and shrubs. Many similar stories, I know, are coming to your mind as you read about and think about the events at Harmony.

Harmony School is private, and Bloomington, Indiana, is hardly downtown Kansas City, Miami, or San Antonio. But students everywhere are pretty much the same. They have the capacity to care. They want to be called to be good, and they know the difference between right and wrong. The fact is that students, too, under the right conditions, not only will be responsive to the calls of civic virtue, but they need to be responsive if they are to develop into the kinds of adults we want them to be.

New Leadership Images

Replacing the politics of division with a politics of virtue requires a redefined leadership. Civic virtue is encouraged when leadership aims to develop a web of moral obligations that administrators, teachers, parents, and even students must accept. One part of this obligation is to share in the responsibility for exercising leadership. Another part of this obligation is to share in the responsibility for ensuring that leadership, whatever its source, is successful. In this redefinition, teachers continue to be responsible for providing leadership in classrooms. But students too have a moral obligation to help make things work. They too provide leadership where they can, and they too try as best they can to make the teacher's leadership effective. Similarly, administrators, parents, and teachers would accept responsibility together for the provision and the success of leadership.

Key to leadership in a democracy is the concept of social contract. Ronald Heifetz (1994) notes, "In part, democracy requires that average citizens become aware that they are indeed the principals, and that those upon whom they confer power are the agents. They have also to bear the risks, the costs, and the fruits of shared responsibility and civic participation" (p. 61).

It is through morally-held role responsibilities that we can understand school administration as a profession in its more traditional sense. School administration is bound not just to standards of technical competence, but to standards of public obligation as well (Bellah, 1985). The primacy of public obligation leads us to the roots of school leadership – stewardship defined as a commitment to administer the needs of the school by serving its purposes, by serving those who struggle to embody these purposes, and by acting as a guardian to protect the institutional integrity of the school.

Principals function as stewards by providing for the overseeing and caring of their schools. As stewards, they are not so much managers or executives but administrators. According to Webster, to "manage" means to handle, to control, to make submissive, to direct an organization. "Superintend," in turn, means attending to, giving attention to, having oversight over what is intended. It means, in other words, supervision. As "supervisor" the principal acts in loco parentis in relationship to students, ensuring that all is well for them. And as supervisor the principal acts as steward, guarding and protecting the school's purposes and structures.

Supervision in communities implies accountability, but not in the tough, inspectoral sense suggested by factory images of inspection and control. Instead, it implies an accountability embedded in tough and tender caring. Principals care enough about the school, about the values and purposes that undergird it, about the students who are being served, about the parents who they represent, about the teachers upon whom they depend, that they will do whatever they can to protect school values and purposes on the one hand, and to enable their accomplishment on the other.

In a recent interview Deborah Meier, then co-director of the celebrated Central Park East Secondary School in New York City, was asked, "What is the role of the principal in an effective school?" (Scherer, 1994). Her response shows how the various ministerial roles of the principal are brought together by supervision understood as an expression of stewardship:

> Someone has to keep an eye on the whole and alert everyone when parts need close- or long-range attention. A principal's job is to put forth to the staff an agenda. The staff may or may not agree, but they have an opportunity to discuss it. I'll say, 'Listen, I've been around class after class, and I notice this, don't notice this, we made a commitment to be accountable for one another, but I didn't see anybody visiting anybody else's class. . . . Paul [Schwartz, Meier's co-director] and I also read all the teacher's assessments of students. Once we noticed that the 9th and the 10th grade math teachers often said the kids didn't seem to have an aptitude for math. We asked the math staff, 'How can these kids do nicely in 7th and 8th grade, and then seem inept in 9th and 10th? Are we fooling ourselves in 7th and 8th, or are we fooling ourselves in 9th and 10th? Because they are the same kids' (p. 7).

Meier and Schwartz both practiced leadership that is idea-based. The source of authority they appealed to are the values that are central to the school, and the commitments that everyone has made to them. And because of this, their supervisory responsibilities do not compromise democratic principles, dampen teacher empowerment, or get in the way of community building. Both directors were committed to creating a staff-run school with high standards—one where staff must know each other, be familiar with each other's work, and know how the school operates. As Meier (1992) explained, "Decisions are made as close to each teacher's own classroom setting as possible, although all decisions are ultimately the responsibility of the whole staff. The decisions are not merely on minor matters--length of classes or the number of field trips. The teachers collectively decide on content, pedagogy, and assessment as well. They teach what they think matters . . . governance is simple. There are virtually no permanent standing committees. Finally, we work together to develop assessment systems for our students, their families, ourselves, and the broader public. Systems that represent our values and beliefs in as direct a manner as possible" (p. 607). This process of shared decision-making is not institutionalized into a formal system, but is embedded in the daily interactions of everyone working together.

In stewardship the legitimacy of leadership comes in part from the virtuous responsibilities associated with the principal's role, and in part from the principal's obligation to function as the head follower of the school's moral compact. In exercising these responsibilities and obligations it is not enough to make the right moves for just any purpose or just any vision. The noted historian and leadership theorist James MacGregor Burns (1978) pointed out that purposes and visions should be socially useful, should serve the common good, should meet the needs of followers, and should elevate followers to a higher moral level. He calls this kind of leadership *transformational*.

Many business writers and their imitators in educational administration have secularized this original definition of Transformational Leadership to make it more suitable to the values of formal organizations. They "conceive of transformation, not in Burns's sense of elevating the moral functioning of a polity, but in the sense of inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and personal considerations . . ., or altering the basic normative principals that guide an institution . . ." (Heifetz, 1994, pp. 228-289; see also Bass, 1985; Hargrove, 1989). This revisionist concept of Transformational Leadership might be alright for managers and CEOs in business organizations. But when it comes to the kind of leadership they want for their children's schools, few business persons are likely to prefer the corporate definition over Burns's original definition.

When principals practice leadership as stewardship, they commit themselves to building, to serving, to caring for, and to protecting the school and its purposes. They commit themselves to helping others to face problems, and to helping others to make progress in getting problems solved. Leadership as stewardship asks a great deal of leaders and followers alike. It calls both to higher levels of commitment. It calls both to higher levels of goodness. It calls both to higher levels of effort. And it calls both to higher levels of accountability. Leadership as stewardship is the *sine qua non* for cultivating civic virtue. Civic virtue can help transform individual stakeholders into members of a community who share common commitments and who feel a moral obligation to help each other embody those commitments.

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The Impact of Race on School Change Teams

Alison A. Carr-Chellman

Stakeholder Participation

The idea that various individuals or groups who have compelling interests in schooling should be involved in changes affecting them or their families is reaching new levels of popularity with the onset of systemic change methodologies which emphasize stakeholder participation. The terms "community participation" and "stakeholder approach" have several meanings and interpretations but are rooted in stakeholder evaluation (Stake, 1986). Mauriel points to stakeholders as "those attempting to influence the allocation of resources or intended direction of the school system" (1989, p. 147). Power is central to the definition of stakeholder, though oftentimes stakeholders, other than professional educators, are not given substantive power (Rogers, 1968).

Within a school community, major groups have interests in the school or are affected by the educational system. Such groups can be considered the major stakeholders in the community of interest (Reigeluth, 1992). Among these groups are the political, religious, and commercial leaders in the community, the social service and educational personnel, as well as the student and parental populations. This listing of stakeholders is certainly not exhaustive, and it is recognized that each school has its own context and its own set of stakeholders. Early identification of stakeholder groups is crucial in order to avoid the misperception that change is a top-down mandate (Stevenson & Pellicer, 1992; Havelock, 1973).

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Systems Theory

The essence of systems theory in current public school change efforts is summed up by Waller (1961): "As a social organism the school shows an organismic interdependence of its parts; it is not possible to affect a part of it without affecting the whole" (p. 6). A systems approach to schools, then, identifies interdependencies and designs new systems of learning that more adequately advance the human condition. While systems theories are based heavily on military-industrial approaches to the creation of instruction and the current TQM movement, systems thinking as it applies to the current wave of school change is more interested in holistic thinking, stakeholder participation, local control, and equity than previous movements of systems technologies.

One notable agreement in educational systems design literature is the importance of community participation. Reigeluth (1992) and Banathy (1991) express concern over the state of community "buy-in" at the outset of design efforts. Reigeluth points to the importance of fundamental support for change efforts: "The change process is far more likely to be successful if there is grass-roots community support for fundamental change" (p. 120). Banathy echoes the importance of community support, writing that "[support] has to be generated by inviting and encouraging a genuine involvement of representatives of the community in the design activity" (p. 168).

Aside from the political benefits of community support, stakeholder participation in systemic change pays off with more powerful ideas for creating a new school environment. Systems theory emphasizes stakeholder participation because bringing those with competing ideologies together over a problem is more likely to expose important interconnections among system components. Group-based collaborative design, while more difficult to accomplish, is also more likely to highlight effects that changes in one part of the system have on other parts of the system.

Decision-making powers should be shared equally with parents, social service agents, government leaders, business constituents, religious leaders, minority groups, even students where possible. Historically, community participation and community control movements have not delivered significant shifts in school-based power structures (Daresh, 1992; Fantini, Gittell & Magat, 1970). The potency of community participation lies not in its ability to co-opt political support for already-made decisions. Instead, the power of community participation in the change of our public schools comes from shifting power and responsibility to members of a community who are all invested in educational outcomes. The current structure of public schools places much of the power in the hands of boards of education and educational administrations who some theorists view as perpetuating the hegemony of the current educational system (Dawson, 1982).

In addition, parental and community participation *invites* ideological conflict among divergent community factions which can be both a source of energy and a source of vexation. Koetting (1994) explains, "Working through the conflict, struggling and negotiating meanings on the contested terrain can leave one unsettled, experiencing a feeling of 'chaos'" (p. 55). The collaborative development of school and public policies, however, is the hallmark of our democratic society (Giroux, 1992; Crowson, 1992), and true stakeholder negotiation creates in the school a space for contestation. As Cohen (1983) puts it so aptly, "if one believes that there are important differences of view, it seems sensible to want the views to be articulated in the process of policy argument and political decision" (p. 79).

Race, Class, and Gender

The importance of social stratification cannot be underestimated when considering stakeholder participation in school change. The fact that power is an immutable force in public school policy-making is unavoidable. As Counts (1932) succinctly puts it, "on all genuinely crucial matters, the school follows the wishes of the groups or classes that actually rule society" (p. 25). The power that individuals wield as a result of their social status based on race, class, or gender identity has an impact on the resulting plans for school change that emerge from the team's efforts.

Most of the research conducted in education about race, class, and gender has focused on the students in the school environment (e.g., Grant, 1985; Sadker & Sadker, 1985; Moore & Smith, 1986; Velez, 1989). A few important sources of information do exist with regard to race and parental participation (e.g., Collins, Moles, & Cross, 1982; Epstein, 1987; Becker & Epstein, 1982; Lightfoot, 1978). Comer (1988) explains that some parents, ashamed of their speech, dress, or failure to hold jobs, maintain a defensive posture which can lead to hostility and avoidance of any contact with schools. Comer suggests that a mutual distrust builds among populations who are unfamiliar with one another, leading to alienation between school and home. This alienation in turn produces a difficulty in nurturing a bond between child and teacher that can support development and learning. The child becomes disappointed in school and risks dropping out of the educational system entirely. This is a vicious cycle which repeats itself; too often students who drop out of school become parents who cannot walk school halls with dignity because of their shame about dropping out. Fliers sent home to invite parents to become involved will not break through these difficult walls of dissonance, shame, and alienation.

Project Description

This study represents a post-hoc analysis of data which emerged from a study (Carr, 1993, 1994), the purpose of which was to examine membership selection criteria for school teams. In this investigation, six schools were followed for six months during the process of selecting and initiating parental and community involvement on advisory councils. The schools were located in a major urban city in the Midwest (we will call it the MidWest district). Personal and telephone interviews were conducted with minority parents and with parents who had not been active in the school. These follow-up interviews sought to identify parent perceptions of team membership issues and power. Questions centered on: 1) why members did or did not attend meetings, 2) why members did or did not participate in meetings they attended, 3) perceptions of team power, 4) positive and negative team member characteristics, and 5) aspects of the experience that would draw parents to more meetings.

Results

The most starling finding is perhaps also the most predictable. The participation rates and attendance rates among minority participants were lower than non-minority participants, and father populations were markedly underrepresented (see Tables 1 & 2). Attrition rates among minority participants, however, were higher. In all six schools African-American students represented approximately 48% of the total student population; minority parent participation on Parent/Community Advisory Committees (PCAC's), however, reached a high of only 31%. Fathers seemed to be more active and remain active when substantial power was invested in the team. Fathers did not want to spend their time raising funds or baking cookies, but when given the opportunity were interested in curricular and school policy issues that would impact their children.

Follow-Up

Follow-up interviews showed that most parents cited time constraints such as job conflicts or just being too busy as the primary reason for the absence (44%). Other reasons included family obligations, lack of information from schools and illness. Several parents identified feelings of "being out of it" or lacking motivation.

Obstacles Parents Face

There are many causes for the lack of-minority participation, including transportation to and from school, child care during meeting times, work

Table 1

Category		Total	Minority	White	Total %	Minority %	Non-Minority %
Initial Roster	6 cases	108	29	79	100	27	73
1st Meeting	6 cases	73	20	53	100	27	73
2nd Meeting	5 cases	48	15	31	100	31	65
3rd Meeting	3 cases	35	4	29	100	11	89

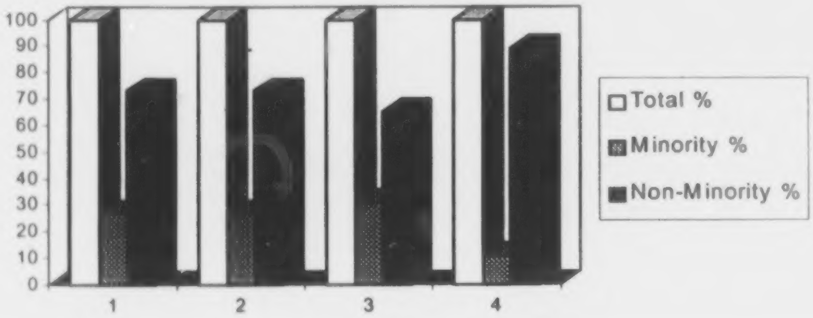
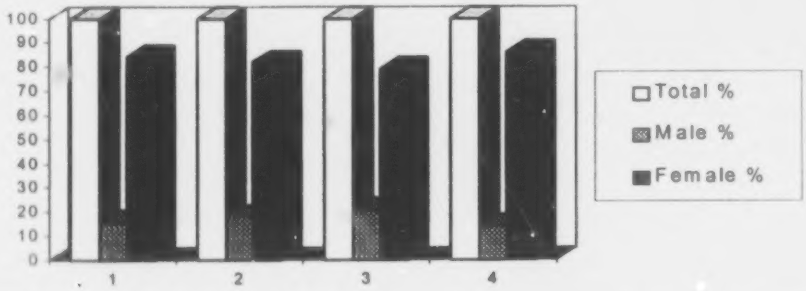


Table 2

Category		Total	Male	Female	Total %	Male %	Female %
Initial Roster	6 cases	108	17	91	100	16	84
1st Meeting	6 cases	73	13	60	100	18	82
2nd Meeting	5 cases	48	10	38	100	21	79
3rd Meeting	3 cases	35	5	30	100	14	86



obligations, and lack of time. Race, class, and gender all interact in this study to produce high attrition and low participation among minority and father populations.

The primary obstacle cited was work priorities and obligations. The following statement by one school staff member illustrates the feeling of many professional educators trying to increase participation:

> *First, parents have less energy... I guess that translates to less time. They're paying more attention to their careers and jobs, because of the economy, I suppose. Both parents are working, and Mom doesn't have time to come here anymore.*

Child care becomes an issue when working mothers cannot find sitters (or cannot afford them) in order to attend an evening meeting. If the team meets during the day, the mothers cannot attend because they are working. If the team meets at night, parents who may not have the financial ability to hire sitters may have to leave their children home alone. The following parent comment reflects this inherent conflict:

> *The time they set was bad. My son would have had to stay at home until after the meeting. I didn't like this time. If it had been during school, or when someone was home to just, you know, be around . . . but this neighborhood is not good enough to leave him alone in the house.*

Obstacles Schools Erect

While parents face a variety of obstacles in their own environment, schools also erect certain blocks to full participation. In this case, most schools engaged in open membership, but focused on certain parent groups. Parents who had exhibited high levels of activity in the school in the past were valued participants and at times were personally encouraged by the principal to become members of the PCAC. When asked about selection criteria, one principal offered the following:

> *Past involvement with school programs. Basically band, yeah, hey, Booster Parents are your best parents. I guess those are the available parents. You know, they give their off time.*

This focus on available parents may increase the feelings of inadequacy among lower-class populations who often were working two jobs to get by. It is difficult to hear unheard voices when the only ones being targeted for inclusion are those who have been involved in the past. Therefore, membership on the team, while pledged to be "open," was really full of hidden obstacles for populations that were previously uninvolved. One principal identified both the pro and con of engaging active parents.

> *On the plus side, you get people coming in who have worked on these kinds of teams before, so you get experienced members. On the other hand, those members also come with a set of preconceptions about the school, about how to conduct the process. They aren't a blank slate, and sometimes that can be better if you are trying to design something new.*

Administrators in the study identified the difficulties certain parent groups face when they come to school. One administrator said:

> *Some of these parents are overwhelmed by teachers. They may have been dropouts or delinquent when they were in school. They don't want to be talked down to – they want to be able to walk in these halls and maintain their dignity and pride. Schools should encourage parents to come in.*

A common trend in many schools is to involve school personnel in a decision-making team (teachers, administrators, staff) while relegating parents and community members to advisory boards where professional educators are often also represented. One decision-making design team met during the school day when it was almost impossible for many underrepresented populations to attend. Businesspeople, working single mothers, and most fathers were not able to attend regularly- scheduled daytime meetings unless they obtained work release or suffered lost pay. These models encourage differential power distributions skewed toward non-working mothers, upper- and middle-class fathers, businesspeople (who are willing to invest time and money into educational outcomes in the hopes of cutting retraining costs in the future), and professional educators.

Differential power distributions which stem in large part from feelings of professionalism among school faculty and administration can be another obstacle erected by schools (Rogers, 1968). Outcomes-based education, systemic change, and educational design can be used in ways that exclude those who are not familiar with the educational literature base. The lack of minority and male representation on these teams and high levels of attrition among these groups were common difficulties, and strategies for dealing with this absence of balance varied from buddy systems and baby-sitting services, to town meetings and home visits. The idea that imbalances on the team represented a threat to the designs produced by the team occurred to only one principal. That principal stated:

> *For whatever reason, segregation, desegregation, reassignment, whatever, parents have been taken out of the process, and they need to come back in. We need the parents who are uncomfortable, our Chapter I parents, as many parents from as many different backgrounds as possible. We need to bring them here, or else we won't be addressing all the issues of parents.*

Discussion

Generally speaking, where empowered teams do exist, we see an overwhelming number of participants from the middle-class white mother population. This is in substantial disproportion to the general school or community population. What is the impact of this disproportionate representation on the team that will be charged with visioning the future of schools in their community? There are two important impacts on design teams that are imbalanced: 1) lack of broad-based stakeholder commitment to change efforts, and; 2) skewed designs. It seems apparent that if stakeholder groups are disproportionately represented on powerful teams, decisions made by those teams will not gain broad-based public support or favor. The primary advantage to having stakeholder participation is the political cover that it offers; without this benefit, the pain of collaborative design should be heartily questioned.

Perhaps the more important implication of imbalanced design teams is the tendency for the status quo and current system to be perpetuated. Here is a simple example of this problem: One obstacle for poor parents in schools is that they may have failed at their own education. They are uncomfortable with the idea of returning to an institution that was less than helpful to them. What perspective is lost when people who have failed in the system are unrepresented on decision-making design teams? The perspective that is most likely to offer us substantially-altered visions of schools is lost. It has been noted that the toughest parents to convince about change are parents of gifted and talented learners. Their children are succeeding in the current system and will reap the benefits of a society in which schools sort individuals instead of developing them.

It is imperative that all members of a community feel empowered, feel that they have something substantial to offer to these new visions, that their opinions count even if they do not have a teaching certificate, college degree, or even a high school equivalency. It is important that we address the issues of all stakeholders in truly systemic change or else the resultant designs and new systems of learning will represent only the visions of a select few.

How can we rectify the situation? There may be several alternatives, including public relations campaigns, careful recruiting and selection of design-team members, attention to monies spent by various factions to ensure equity, and careful de-expertising of the change processes to make them accessible to all stakeholder groups. And perhaps we need to take design- and change-process competencies to underrepresented populations first so they can see these skills as an empowering tool they can use to their advantage.

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In Search of the Elusive Magic Bullet: Parental Involvement and Student Outcomes

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Background

Parental involvement in education has been the focus of much research attention. While it is generally accepted that parental involvement in education is desirable, there is little agreement on how it may best be implemented. Evidently, it is seldom implemented in a way that is satisfactory to all stakeholder groups (e.g., students, parents, teachers, and school administrators). This paradox stems in part from the fact that parental involvement comprises a wide range of processes, events, and conditions. In addition, stakeholder groups entertain a diversity of goals, ranging from improved student achievement to increased community support for schools. Their varied perspectives produce different beliefs about what forms of parental involvement are most helpful in achieving the respective goals.

Intuitively, there seems little doubt that parents play a critical role in their children's cognitive development and school achievement (Scott-Jones, 1984). There is, in fact, an abundance of evidence that parental involvement can have a positive impact on the process and outcomes of schooling (Edmonds, 1979; Walberg, 1984). McLaughlin and Shields (1986), for example, reported that parents can contribute to improved student achievement through their involvement in (a) the selection of appropriate reading materials, (b) targeting educational services, and (c) the use of particular pedagogical strategies. Clark (1983) found a correlation between achievement in reading and mathematics and the number of books at home. The National Institute of Education (1985) has identified other home-based achievement corre-

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lates: (a) providing a regular place and specific times for school work, (b) providing access to libraries and museums, and (c) availability of parents themselves as educational resources.

Becher (1984) found that reading to children enhances their receptive and expressive vocabularies as well as literal and inferential comprehension skills. According to the author, the act of reading to the child establishes reading as a valued activity, develops shared topics of interest, and promotes interaction among family members. Similarly, Sider and Sledjeski (1978) found that parents who read for their own enjoyment model reading as a valued activity and their children have more positive attitudes toward reading and school achievement. Other research suggests that parents can help most effectively in providing home reinforcement of school learning by supplementing school work at home, and monitoring and encouraging their children's learning (Armor et al., 1976; Brandt, 1979; Melargo, Lyons & Sparks, 1981; Sinclair, 1981; Walberg, 1984; Weilby, 1979).

However, parental involvement in the instructional process has seldom been emphasized. Griswold, Cotton, and Hansen (1986), for example, identified the least popular parental involvement activities to be monitoring homework, providing input on homework, and stimulating discussions at home. Much more popular were parent committees, parent-teacher meetings, and workshops on parental involvement. In fact, most parental involvement activities are only tangentially, if at all, related to children's cognitive development and school achievement. It is, therefore, not surprising that to many school people, the impact of parental involvement on children's school achievement has largely been unclear (Paddock ,1979; Fullan, 1982).

Regardless of what roles parents may play to enhance their child's education, a range of conditions can impede parental involvement. Examples include:

Narrow conceptualization. Teachers and school administrators often view parental involvement only in terms of attendance at parent-teacher conferences and other formal meetings. This narrow conceptualization is partly due to a mechanistic interpretation of earlier federal mandates for parental involvement. This interpretation emphasizes the role of parents as decision makers and advocates. Little attention is paid to the role of parents as active partners (with school) in the child's education.

Inappropriate attitudes. There is a tendency for school administrators and teachers to undervalue parental involvement, particularly involvement from working class or non-traditional families. Teachers may have different expectations of parents based on class or cultural differences. For example, they often see single parents as less responsible for their child's education when these parents actually spend more time with their child on learning activities at home than married parents (Epstein ,1985). Some teachers believe that low-income parents will not or cannot participate in the child's school work, or that their participation will not be beneficial (Epstein, 1983). There is in fact evidence that teachers tend to initiate contact with upper middle class parents more often (than lower class parents) and for a wider variety of reasons (Mager, 1980).

Lack of teacher preparation. Historically, parental involvement as an integral part of the educational process has received little or no attention in teacher training programs. As a result, teachers are often uncertain about how to involve parents in school or instructional activities. In some cases, allowing parental involvement is seen as relinquishing teachers' role as experts on educational matters. When parents are involved in classroom activities (e.g., serving as aides), teachers are concerned that the parents (a) will not follow instructions, (b) may not know how to work with children, and (c) may not keep their commitments (Powell, 1980).

Parental occupational limitations. Parents' occupations may limit their availability for involvement activities. Their work schedules may make it difficult or impossible to attend meetings or to serve as a volunteer. Low wages may force parents to work more than one job, limiting their availability to be involved in learning activities at home. Limited financial resources may reduce their ability to create a supportive home environment or to provide materials which their child needs to be successful in school.

Cultural characteristics. The home culture can, in some cases, deter parental involvement. For example, the home culture may differ from the school culture, making effective school-home communication difficult. The home culture may hold educational institutions in such high regard that it is not considered appropriate for parents to interact with educators or raise questions about school events. As a result, parents may be reluctant to initiate contact with school, perceiving such activities as questioning the decisions or actions of experts.

Clearly, a major challenge facing the education community is to identify effective parental involvement practices which can be adopted by parents, teachers, and school administrators. Identification of practices directly related to student achievement would be particularly helpful.

Chapter 1 Parental Involvement

Parental involvement has been a congressionally mandated component of the Chapter 1 (now Title I) program since its inception. For nearly three decades, requirements for parental involvement have changed, but some form of parental consultation has always been an important part of Chapter 1 programs. Indeed, parental involvement has served as a means of ensuring that high quality instructional services are provided to educationally disadvantaged students participating in Chapter 1 programs. Chapter 1 legislation (i.e., P. L. 100-297, the 1988 Hawkins-Stafford Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Amendments) placed great emphasis on parental involvement as a means of maintaining and improving educational services to disadvantaged children.

The Honolulu School District offers Chapter 1 services at 21 elementary and secondary schools in the district. The district's goal of parental involvement in Chapter 1 is to create a working relationship between home and school in the education of disadvantaged children. Success in this partnership requires that parents accept responsibility to provide educational experiences for their children and that school personnel assist parents to become active partners in the educational process.

Purpose of the Study

Ultimately, the goal of parental involvement is to improve student achievement. While parental involvement could have considerable value (e.g., galvanizing community support for education) that may not directly accrue to student performance, the primary purpose of this study is to identify specific parental involvement practices that contribute to positive student outcomes.

Data Collection and Analysis

Home-Based Activities

To gather data on home-based parental involvement activities, a questionnaire survey was conducted with a random sample of ten Chapter 1 schools, stratified to include elementary, intermediate, and high schools. The sample included six elementary, two intermediate, and two high schools. Within each school, Chapter 1 classes were used as the primary sampling units to facilitate the conduct of the questionnaire survey and other data collection activities. A survey questionnaire was developed to collect data from students on such home-based activities as:

- Reading to child
- Encouraging child to read
- Visiting the library with child
- Providing books at home
- Keeping aware of child's reading progress
- Providing a place for child to study
- Setting aside a specific time for child to study
- Helping child to do his/her homework when necessary
- Caring about what child does in Chapter 1 and the regular school program

Survey data were collected from a total sample of 328 students in grades three through nine in April and May 1992. Student responses on frequency of parental involvement activities were converted to a three-point scale as follows:

3 = Always
2 = Sometimes
1 = Never

Student Outcomes

The study included the following measures of student achievement:

- Reading achievement
- School attendance
- Grade point averages for language arts

These variables were selected because they were widely used as measures of success for Chapter 1 projects. The student outcome data were collected for the sample students from school and project files for the 1991-92 school year.

Reading achievement was measured by the Metropolitan Achievement Test (Reading Comprehension), using a metric called normal curve equivalent (NCE). NCE scores range from 1 to 99 and have a mean of 50.

School attendance data consisted of number of days absent for the 1991-92 school year.

Grade point averages (GPAs) for language arts for the 1991-92 school year were converted to a five-point scale as follows to accommodate different grading systems used in the sample schools:

5 = A or E (Excellent)
4 = B or S+ (Satisfactory plus)
3 = C or S
2 = D or S-
1 = F or N (Not Satisfactory)

Descriptive and correlational analyses were conducted to determine the extent of parental involvement in the instructional process and its relationships with the student outcome measures. Individual students were used as units of analysis. Descriptive statistics included percentages, means, and standard deviations on parental involvement activities and student outcomes. Correlation coefficients were computed between parental involvement activities and student outcomes.

Findings

The students came from a diversity of cultural backgrounds, with the majority being Asians or Pacific Islanders. Close to one-half of the students were from families with an annual income of $20,000 or less. The student survey results (summarized in Table 1) suggest that there was a moderately high level of home-based parental involvement activity. The data show, for example, that:

- A majority (66%) of the students reported that their parents read to them at least sometimes.
- More than two-thirds (79%) said they were encouraged to read to their parents at least sometimes.
- One-half indicated that their parents visited the library with them at least sometimes.

On the other hand, the data also suggest that a significant proportion of the parents never read to their child (34%), encouraged their child to read to them (21%), or visited the library with their child (50%).

Achievement Correlates

As shown in Table 2, the NCE data reflect a performance pattern consistent with the national trend, with higher scores in the spring (32.7 for 1991 and 34.3 for 1992) and a decline in the fall (24.1 for 1991). The other outcome data provide a generally positive picture of performance in GPAs for language arts and school attendance. The GPA and attendance data suggest that the average student in the study sample received a B in his or her language arts class and was absent 7.5 days during the 1991-92 school year.

Several significant correlations were found between student performance as measured by a norm-referenced test and parental involvement activities. Specifically, the data (summarized in Table 3) show that NCE scores from the Metropolitan Achievement Test were correlated with the following items:

- My parent cares about what we do in my Chapter 1 class.
- My parent encourages me to read.
- My parent keeps track of my progress in school work.
- My parent makes sure that there is a place for me to study at home.

The correlation coefficients range from low 20's to high 20's. It is noteworthy that no significant correlations were found between parental involvement activities and GPA in language arts or school attendance.

Table 1. Percent of Students Reporting Home-Based Parental Involvement Activities (N=328)

	Extent of Involvement		
Activity	Never	Sometimes	Always
My parent reads to me.	33.9	57.9	8.2
My parent encourages me to read to him/her.	21.0	50.6	28.3
My parent visits the library with me.	50.0	42.4	7.6
My parent encourages me to use the library.	21.0	41.4	37.6
My parent provides books in my home.	9.9	35.8	54.3
My parent keeps track of my progress in school work.	4.4	32.7	62.9
My parent makes sure that there is a place for me to study at home.	10.4	32.0	57.6
My parent sets aside a specific time for me to study at home.	22.2	42.5	35.2
My parent helps me with my homework when necessary.	11.7	43.2	45.1
My parent cares about what we do in my Chapter 1 class.	6.7	39.4	54.0
My parent cares about what happens at my school.	3.8	28.5	67.7
My parent knows what we do in Chapter 1.	15.5	52.8	31.6

Discussion

The study shows that in the Honolulu School District, there is a moderately high level of parental involvement in the instructional process. More importantly, significant relationships appear to exist between home-based parental involvement activities and student achievement as measured by a norm-referenced test. While the relationships do not appear to be very substantial, they are in the expected direction.

A 1993 review by Wang, Haertel, and Walberg shows that the policies at the program, school, district, state, and federal levels have limited effects on student outcomes compared to the day-to-day efforts of the people (e.g., parents) who are involved in students' lives.

Table 2. Student Outcome Measures (N=328)

Measure	Mean	S.D.
1991 spring NCE*	32.7	10.5
1991 fall NCE	24.1	9.3
1992 spring NCE	34.5	12.4
1991-92 GPA**	4.1	6.3
1991-92 Attendance***	7.5	11.2

*Based on Metropolitan Achievement Test (Reading Comprehension)
**Based on a five-point scale as follows:
5=A or E (Excellent)
4=B or S+ (Satisfactory Plus)
3=C or S
2=D or S -
1=F or N (Not Satisfactory)
The grade point averages were for language arts.
***Average number of days absent.
Note: The large standard deviations (S.D.s) for GPAs and attendance suggest great variation among the students with respect to their GPAs and attendance.

Table 3. Relationships Between Parental Involvement Activities and Student Outcomes (N=328)

Parental Involvement Activity	Student Outcome	Correlation
My parent cares about what we do in my Chapter 1 class.	1991 spring NCE 1992 spring NCE	r = .28** r = .25**
My parent encourages me to read.	1992 spring NCE	r = .22**
My parent keeps track of my progress in school work.	1991 spring NCE	r = .26**
My parent makes sure that there is a place for me to study at home.	1991 spring NCE	r = .22*

*p < .05
** p < .01

The authors conclude that:

> *...state, district, and school policies that have received the most attention in the last decade of educational reform appear least influential on learning. Changing such remote policies, even if they are well-intentioned and well-founded, must focus on proximal variables in order to result in improved practices in classrooms and homes, where learning actually takes place.* (p. 280)

The present study provides further support for that conclusion. To the extent that parental involvement has its inherent value in a participatory democracy, it seems appropriate that Chapter 1 programs should continue to involve parents in program planning and implementation. However, a great deal more attention should be focused on parental involvement in the instructional process. For example, more resources should be devoted to the development and promotion of home-based reinforcement activities. To this end, schools can further enhance parental involvement by:

- promoting parental involvement in the instructional process,
- increasing home-based parental activities to reinforce student learning, and
- developing programs to raise literacy skills of parents, particularly among recent immigrant families.

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Childhood: Our Children's Voices

Frances K. Kochan

Voices, voices, everywhere, raised in alarm, anger, fear, concern, making judgments about what schools must, should, can, cannot do. From the White House to the schoolhouse, it appears as if everyone has an opinion, a solution, a voice. And yet in the midst of this clamor, there are voices not heard; voices that can help center our focus and expand our understanding of the reality which surrounds us (Reed, 1998). Voices which, if we listen with sincerity, may encourage us to seek solutions to the problems of schooling and life with unity and clarity. I speak of the voices of the children: those whom we claim to serve, care about, and love.

Over the past few years, I have had numerous opportunities to meet with large groups of adults from diverse ethnic and social backgrounds. I have asked them to reflect upon the word, "childhood" and to share the first word that comes to their mind. The most common responses are "fun, innocence, laughter, play." But when I have listened to the voices of our children, I have gotten a much different picture.

Seeking to Understand

As our school embarked upon the development of a school improvement plan, we discussed how to enhance our relationships with families and how we might provide support for them and our children. As part of this effort we decided to conduct an anonymous survey of our students at grades three, five, eight, ten, and eleven to gain a deeper understanding of the issues families and children faced. We posed six questions:

- What are you most concerned about right now?
- What is your greatest cause of stress right now?
- If you have a serious problem, to whom do you usually go to talk?
- If you could change one thing about your life, what would it be?

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- What do you think is the most difficult thing facing families of today?
- When you have a family of your own, what would be your greatest wish for that family?

A content analysis of the 300 student responses received was conducted at and across the grade levels. I shall never forget my initial reaction when I began to read our students' responses. When I shared them with our faculty they were stunned. It may be importance to mention the demographics of our school. The population is 70% Caucasian, 22% Afro-American, and 8% other minorities. About 12% of the children are on free or reduced lunch programs.

Hearing the Response

The students' three greatest concerns were divorce, money and finances, and family discord and violence. Third graders had a particular concern about family health problems, and fifth graders worried about societal and community problems such as community violence, homelessness, and drug and alcohol abuse. Students in grades eight, ten, and eleven also identified grades as a major source of concern. Among the most poignant remarks regarding their concerns were:

"my parents and their bad tempers."
"about my uncle being in jail because of me."
"losing jobs and not getting another one."
"surviving adolescence."
"I hardly see my mom because she is working."

When responding to the sources of pressure in their lives, most student's responses centered around life in general, what the future holds, and dealing with peer pressure. One tenth grader said that, "just about everything" was a cause of pressure on him. A third grader stated, "When my mother goes away, and she often does, I have dreams that she dies during it." A fifth grader replied, "Getting to places, and we are always rushed." Another fifth grader remarked, "Sometimes I can't go to sleep because my dad yells at my mom and throws things at her. An eighth grader replied, "whether to do it or not (sex)."

If they have serious problems, younger children said they talked to family members. Older students said they turned to school personnel and friends. Some children indicated they had no one to talk to, and a number of children wrote, "I pray."

If they could change one thing in their lives, most children would improve family relationships. Other often-mentioned improvements were: 1) changing their own physical attributes, 2) getting better grades, 3) having more money, and (4) getting along with others more successfully. One tenth grader wished that, "she did not worry so much about everything." Another said he would "change the way he dealt with stress in his life." One rather whimsical child responded, "to have fewer freckles and curly hair."

Children seem to have some keen perceptions about the problems facing families. They listed divorce, financial needs, drug and alcohol abuse, and community violence as the major problems families have to cope with. When asked about their hopes for the families they could create in the future, they wanted good communication, loving relationships, good health, happiness, and financial security. Some of the more touching responses were:

> "to be happy"
> "they won't do drugs"
> "a nice loving family that does not argue, that is open to talk, and is not afraid"
> "to have a trusting relationship and that they have a better life than I have"
> "I don't want to have a family."

It appears from the voices of our children that they live "at risk." Too often we use that term to denote material poverty. Perhaps we must broaden it and reevaluate our visions of the childhood in which our children live. It is not the childhood of "fun, innocence, laughter, and play." Instead our children are being subjected to personal and social pressures that cause stress and make it difficult for them to deal with daily living. This creates problems for them at home and at school as they seek to deal with situations beyond their control.

Responding to the Voices

The sobering reality of these comments caused us to reflect upon our words, our actions, and our plans for our children and our school. Listening to the voices of our children sensitized us to them in a way that somehow created a bond between us. This bond enabled us to refocus our thinking, our planning, and ourselves. Soon afterwards we initiated the development of a schoolwide program to change the culture of our school so that it operated as a family. We expanded our family outreach endeavors, and we began efforts at community development.

This experience led me to believe that it is imperative that we find ways to transmit the world of childhood to a broader audience. Statistics surround us, but the reality of the world seen and reported through the eyes and words of children has a power of its own. Perhaps these voices could help us to stop blaming teachers, parents, and children for the problems of schools and instead recognize that the world in which our children live is impacting upon their capacity to dream, to learn, to survive. It is time for us to stop pointing fingers, and start joining hands. It is time to hear the voices of our children and to respond by taking actions to strengthen the family, recreate the community, and nurture and love our children. I am haunted by these voices. They have touched my heart and soul. I wish everyone could hear them.

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Our *Changing* Town, Our *Changing* School: Is Common Ground About "Good" Classroom Practices Possible?

Jean L. Konzal

A Readers Theater Presentation

The Setting

This drama takes place in Grover's Corners[1] revisited, an old New England town in a state of flux—a town peopled by old time residents and recent newcomers. While differences in race and ethnicity are minimal, differences based on length of residence in Grover's Corners and on class are evident. Since the mid-1980s "people from away" have increasingly taken up residence in town. Living in new developments carved out of the rich farmland with magnificent vistas of rolling hillsides, these new people have brought new values and demands to the town.

The high school is also in flux. In the midst of a major building project, the school has been in the process of change since the early 1980's. Teachers have been struggling to redefine a "good secondary school" and to gain consensus within the professional community. They have only recently begun to struggle with the problem of bringing parents into the debate.

During the past four years two curriculum changes have raised the eyebrows of many of Grover's Corners parents. Two math teachers developed a new math course of study which called for the integration of the distinct math courses (Algebra I, Geometry, etc.) into courses called Math 1 and Math 2. In addition, the program called for heterogeneous grouping, cooperative groupwork and an emphasis on problem-solving rather than on rote memorization.

Following close on their heels, three social studies teachers developed and introduced a required two year social studies course which raised the stan-

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dard for passing from 65% to 85% and which required each student to do public presentations at the end of each year's work.

While there was opposition to the changed classroom practices in both cases, opposition to the math changes were more vociferous and resulted in a refinement of the program. Opposition to the practices in the Social Studies program did not result in any program adaptations. While there are many reasons for this, one contributing factor is that those parents who opposed the math changes were primarily representative of the town's elite, while those who opposed the social studies changes were not.

Playwright's Notes

I conducted this study in the fall of 1994 in order to fulfill the requirements of my doctoral dissertation. Elliot Eisner's (1991; 1993; 1995) notions about using art as a metaphor for research instead of science and Robert Donmoyer and June Yennie-Donmoyer's use of Readers Theater influenced my approach to this study. As I listened to the transcripts of my interviews with the parents and educators of Grover's Corners I was taken by the passion with which they spoke. How could I capture that passion and be true to their emotion as well as to their words? I considered creating small dialogue pieces to try to capture it. It wasn't until I met Robert Donmoyer and June Yennie-Donmoyer at Elliot Eisner's AERA sponsored "Arts-based Educational Research Institute" and participated in their Readers Theater presentation *In Their Own Words*, (1994) that I considered theater as my medium.

Once I began working with what I had collected, like most qualitative researchers, I found myself buried in data. Where should I begin? How should I begin? As I began to organize and reorganize my data I began to realize that I had dug myself a very large hole. Not only had I committed myself to making sense out of this data in a way that would be credible in the research community, but I had also committed myself to do it in an aesthetically pleasing way. While I was a novice researcher, I soon discovered, I was even more of a novice when it came to writing Readers Theater scripts.

I had none of the craft of script writing available to me. I have to admit to a very naive view of the craft. I thought that all I had to do was piece together dialogue from the parent transcripts, which had been coded and analyzed using traditional qualitative research approaches, and *voila* a script would emerge! How wrong I was! The response to my first attempts were sobering. While I might have been true to the data from a researcher's point of view, from an artistic point of view, I had not created a piece which was aesthetically pleasing. While parent and educator voices were in many cases passionate, transcript segments taken out of context lacked the passion. In addition, conversational language lacks the aesthetic quality of language that is thoughtfully created. When I reflect back to the Donmoyers' piece I realize that there were significant differences between the material they used and the material I used. Their script was a montage of written pieces produced by students crafted with care. Mine was pieced together from conversations. I had almost 1000 pages of transcripts to analyze and interpret. Their script was composed from a much smaller set of essays. My task was much more complex. And even they had questioned whether text which was not crafted with aesthetic considerations would work as well as text which was crafted aesthetically (Donmoyer & Yennie-Donmoyer, 1995).

I went through several stages in my script construction process—from naive cutting and pasting of verbatim transcript segments to carefully considered arranging of edited transcript segments and segments written by me. As time went on, I became bolder in my willingness to tamper with the verbatim transcripts. My transparent voice in the script became more and more pronounced. As I did this, I became more and more disturbed by the seemingly contradictory directions my work was taking. On the one hand, as a researcher, I wanted to be as true as possible to the people who gave me their words, but yet as a "playwright/artist" I wanted to craft a piece that would work aesthetically and would also represent my interpretation of the parent's and educator's voices. To do this, I became more and more willing to play with their words. In my mind the changes and the additions I made clarified and made coherent the many voices.

At one point I began to wonder if I might be able to be more true to the voices of those I interviewed if, instead of using the transcripts, I created my own dialogue based on the ideas and emotions embedded in the transcripts. However, for this piece I did not move too far beyond the words of those I interviewed. The script that follows attempts to stay true to the meanings of those who spoke with me. In order to assure that this is so, I sent drafts of the script to all of the parents and educators whose voices I used and asked them to review them to make sure I represented their views as they would have liked them to be represented. They assured me that they felt comfortable with the way their voices are presented.

I offer this Readers Theater script as a vehicle for opening up dialogue between parents and educators about what teaching and learning practices go on in "good" secondary schools and what teaching and learning practices should go on in their particular school. Through a series of workshops I propose to begin the process of uncovering "mental models"[2] that contribute to different understandings of what goes on in "good" secondary schools. The workshops involve the staging of either this Readers Theater script or a second script originally published in the *School Community Journal*, Volume 6, Number 2, depending upon the needs of the particular school. That original script examines the different mental models that parents in a community hold about "good" classroom practices, and the one republished here illuminates the differences between educator mental models and parent mental models, as well as identifying the barriers that prevent parents and educators from talking with each other about their differences. Using the staging of the scripts as a catalyst for dialogue, participants will be led through a process that uncovers differing mental models, identifies barriers to communication in their school community, and then works through the barriers towards rebuilding common mental models. My goal is to create an environment conducive to continued and on-going dialogue between parents and educators as they work towards a common vision of "good" teaching and learning practices for their school.

Our *Changing* Town, Our *Changing* School: Is Common Ground Possible Between Parents and Educators?

Voices

Researcher/Playwright	Stage Manager
Educators	Teachers: Reform Supporters
	Teachers: Reform Dissenters
	Administrators: Reform Supporters
Parents	From Away
	From Town and Surrounding Towns
	From State, But Not Surrounding Towns
Scholars	Linda Darling-Hammond
	Michael Fullan
	Paul Hill
	Seymour Sarason
	Peter Senge
	Thomas Sergiovanni

Scholars appear throughout this script at different times. Ensemble members take turns reading the scholar quotes. A podium is placed upstage left. A mortarboard and name signs are placed on the podium. As each 'scholar' speaks, the ensemble member dons the mortarboard and places the appropriate name sign on the podium and speaks. After they speak they take off mortar board, remove name sign, and return to their place as ensemble members.

Sergiovanni: The bonding together of people in special ways and the binding of them to shared values and ideas are the defining characteristics of schools as communities. Communities are defined by their centers of values, sentiments, and beliefs that provide the needed conditions for creating a sense of "we" from "I" (Sergiovanni, 1994, p. 4).

Stage Manager: *(To Audience)* It sounds so idyllic, community, but creating community among educators within a school (especially high schools) has proven to be a very slow and difficult process. And even in those cases where community has coalesced among educators, the attempt to then include parents has proven to be even more difficult. What about the parents? Why is it so hard to include parents in the school community? One reason may be the raised voice of teachers in schooling decisions. One scholar, Linda Darling-Hammond, while advocating for the professionalization of teaching, recognizes that this may alter the power balance in schools. Could this be one contributing factor to the difficulty of including parents in the school community?

Linda Darling-Hammond: Why should we seek to create a professional culture within schools? This question is the first order of business for those who would reform education through a new construction of teaching. The answer, though not mysterious, is not altogether straightforward. Establishing a professional culture within schools may produce teaching that is more knowledgeable and responsive to student needs; it will also disturb the delicate balance between state, community, and parental interests as they are currently configured and deployed in defining schooling (Darling-Hammond, 1988, p. 55).

Stage Manager: *(To Linda)* In 1988, Linda, you foreshadowed the growing tension that is inherent in the dual components of many reform agendas—teacher professionalism and parent participation, and you, perhaps unintentionally, uncovered one of the reasons why it is so hard to include parents in the school community—the privileging of professional knowledge in the conversations about schooling. *(To Audience)* Professionalizing teaching, on the one hand, while at the same time involving parents more substantially in the life of the school, on the other, sometimes creates conflict. What follows is an examination of the dilemmas facing parents and educators in one rural New England high school, as they continue to build a professional community AND begin to invite parents into the conversation about what goes on in "good" secondary schools.

Cast assembles on stage: 8 actors (4 parents, 4 educators) forming 4 duos. Duos 1 and 2 stand with backs to their partner and arms crossed on chests, Duo 1 is stage left and Duo 2 is stage right. At center stage, each member of Duos 3 and 4 stand side-by-side, but with backs to the *other duo, Duo 3 facing the audience and Duo 4 facing upstage. When Duos speak they face the audience, when finished Duos 1 and 2 resume back to back stance,. Duos 3 and 4 resume positions with backs to the other duo when finished speaking.*

Duo 1

Educator 1: *(Speaking to audience and away from partner)* I teach in the high school and have been active from the beginning in efforts to change our schools. We joined professional networks that led us to believe that we could make curriculum decisions, that we could make decisions about our classrooms, that we could think about teaching. It was a major philosophical change in teaching from teacher as a behaviorist, a dispenser of information, an informer, to teacher as a learner, a constructor of knowledge. We began to gain a deeper understanding of how human beings learn and we began to totally and radically change the organization of our classrooms so that constructivist practices really were evident.

Parent 1: *(Speaking to audience and away from partner)* I attended school in Europe as a child. And I must tell you that the standards there were rigorous. I expect no less for my children. But I must tell you I have been sorely disappointed. Since the 60's they have been guilty of increasingly taking their eye off the drills and skills. I sat through some student presentations and I was absolutely appalled. Now I don't expect sophomores in high school to be professional presenters. I don't expect them to be practiced. I love the kids, I love their charm, I love their honesty. But I was appalled with their lack of education. You don't expect a sophomore to put up a poster which has five spelling mistakes on it—not even corrected spelling mistakes. Therefore I lose interest in the reasoning behind organizing the presentation. All I see is spelling mistakes that a kid of 15 makes—why doesn't this kid know how to spell? The response I get is "Oh well that's less important than what they're trying to say." Not to me it isn't!

Duo 2

Educator 2: *(Speaking to audience and away from partner)* As an educator I possess professional knowledge which parents don't have access to. The work we're doing on these new assessments has been challenging and stimulating for me personally and a real contribution to the education of our children. We had to tap a new framework. And the new framework was focusing on some real simple trans-level, trans-disciplinary demonstrations. And those demonstrations we call compulsory performances. Those are performances that you do in graduate school and you do in kindergarten – reading, writing, illustrating, data analysis, oral presentations, things you do to show that you know something. In addition to writing, we are now asking "Is data analysis, illustrating, diagramming also important for all students?" "Is that as important a performance as is writing?" If it is, it should be compulsory, it should be required of all students.

Parent 2: *(Speaking to audience and away from partner)* I grew up here in town, so did my husband. I did okay in school, but my husband barely got through. He still can't spell very well. I would like them to teach my son how to read and how to write and how to spell. He does not have any of those capabilities. I mean, he can write but he can't spell and his reading is probably on a fifth grade level.

Duo 3

Educator 3: *(Speaking to audience and to partner)* As an educator involved in this reform effort since the beginning, ten years ago, I understand that this change effort is a never-ending process. We keep learning, and as we learn, we change some more. In the future, I can envision a week long simulation of a model government going on in rooms like this all around the building with video cameras set up. Students will come into these rooms and enter into person to person negotiations, caucuses, and so forth. They'll be able to access digitized video to access those segments when they were in that room and pull out sections that they can annotate and say "Here's where I was demonstrating listening to points of view that I don't agree with." "Here's where I was demonstrating negotiation skills and compromise skills" and so forth. They can compile a video portfolio of their behavior during this week long exhibition.

Parent 3: *(Speaking to audience and to partner)* I went to school in a neighboring state. It was a fairly traditional school, but I had one teacher who really inspired me. She was very progressive, she taught a seminar where we had to do research on any topic that interested us. She was demanding, but she really inspired me to find what interested me and to pursue it. I think it was her approach which inspired me to propose an interdisciplinary course to the school – one where the kids produce a community newspaper. They can participate in a variety of ways – as a writer, an editor, a cartoonist – they can be sports writers, salespeople, write advertising copy. Community volunteers with special skills will mentor the kids. It will be self-supporting through advertising sales. I'm all hyped up about it. I just have to convince the school committee.

Duo 3 each turn away from their partner and walk behind Duo 4 and face upstage. Duo 4 face in towards each other and walk forward facing audience.

Duo 4

Educator 4: *(Speaking to audience and to partner)* As a teacher, I'm probably in the minority in the school. I'm a conservative and I really question many of the changes that are being touted here. I firmly believe that the educational establishment is socially more liberal than the public at large. And when you walk in and you use words like "change," "self-esteem," and "group cohesiveness," and you do all those things that are for lack of a better term called "touchy feely," I think you immediately turn off two groups of people. One, the more moderate to conservative parents, and two, the moderate to conservative teachers—like me.

Parent 4: *(Speaking to audience and to partner)* I grew up and went to school in a nearby town. I didn't go to college. I didn't do particularly well in school so I went into the service. And now I own a small business. I listen to the radio a lot while I work—listen to the talk shows. I have heard recently of a new history curriculum being written by extreme liberalists, which leaves out certain parts of history, gives it a slant that shouldn't necessarily be there—you know, like saying that Christopher Columbus didn't discover America. I would be very up front and want to be very involved to make sure that at least it's an objective curriculum. That it doesn't necessarily lean towards liberalism or conservatism, or leave something out that we grew up with that should be in there.

Stage Manager: *(Entering stage left and moving to center stage)* Welcome back to Grover's Corners, to the *New* Grover's Corners to be exact. What you're about to see is a Readers Theater presentation about change—our changing high school and our changing town. As you can imagine, things have changed some since 1913. For the most part, however, like all New England towns, we held on to our cherished traditions and ways of doing things throughout the century while we gradually changed and became more modern. However, about 15 years ago things really began to change in our town and in our schools. That's when *new* people began to move in and that's when we got a *new* superintendent of schools. Our new superintendent encouraged our teachers to begin thinking of themselves as professionals—to become involved in decisions about curriculum and teaching practices. They took her up on it all right, and things haven't been the same since. They changed the schedule at the high school, and they introduced new math and social studies courses. Caused quite a stir, too, yes they did. There were disagreements amongst faculty members. And there were disagreements amongst parents. Some liked the changes, some didn't. Even though we know research has shown that kids do better when parents, teachers, students, and administrators agree about what goes on in a "good" high school, even though we know that, we wonder if we will ever be able to come to consensus about the kind of school we want. Scholars like Michael Fullan urge schools to find a way to come to common understandings. He said:

Michael Fullan: The problem of meaning is one of how those involved in change can come to understand what it is that should change and how it can be best accomplished....Solutions must come through the development of *shared meaning* (Fullan with Steigelbauer, 1991, p. 5).

Stage Manager: Yes, ideally people in schools should have shared meanings, but Michael, coming to consensus within the faculty has not been easy and we're not there yet. A faculty meeting is getting under way. Let's listen in.

To the count of 12 and parents chanting "Drills and Skills" and teachers chanting "Compulsory performances", ensemble forms two groups. Center stage, 2 teachers seated in chairs, facing audience, and two teachers seated on stools behind first two teachers. 2 parents on either side of the four teachers standing behind chairs heads down.

Educator 2: Those exhibitions, no matter how a student writes, no matter what kinds of knowledge they come with, are always above where they can be. What we ask them to aim for requires strenuous work of any student and for some of our students requires more work to get there then they have ever put in. We say:

Educator 3: *(Standing when speaking)* "You've got to get to the standard. And if you don't get to the standard the first time you have to come back afterwards, work with us and have us help you get there. You eventually have to get there."

Educator 2: It's going to require much hard work from them and from me. It's going to require my sitting down with them three or four times over the course of the paper, one on one, in a tutorial session saying:

Educator 3: *(Standing when speaking)* "Let's look at your sentences, let's look at your section. Have you used evidence?"

Educator 4: I think that one of the things that the Social Studies program did was to up the ante. But what I questioned then and still think about now is, what are we raising the ante for and what assumptions are causing us to do that? Is it that we want everyone to go to college? Does every person in a democratic society always stand up in a meeting and present a public position or does someone do the research and someone else do the presentation? Does the President write all of his speeches?

All Educators: *(Standing when speaking)* I don't think so.

Educator 1: Does he do all of his own research?

All Educators: *(Standing when speaking)* I don't think so.

Educator 4: So I ask, "Well, what does it mean in terms of what I have learned and know about pedagogy?" I'm not sure that it meets the needs of all the kids.

Educator 3: I had mixed emotions about heterogeneous groupings. In certain cases I think sometimes it doesn't make sense.

Educator 1: I feel good about heterogeneous grouping. The students who used to be in the standard track are doing a lot more work now. They're not being dismissed as they used to be when the message we gave them was:

Educator 2: *(Standing when speaking)* "You don't really have to do this because you're not very bright anyway."

Educator 1: I think people who are college bound or honors are now sitting in classrooms with some kids who have some pretty profound thoughts and who feel comfortable about voicing them. Some of these "so-called" smart kids are suddenly looking at these other kids differently and saying:

Educator 2: *(Standing when speaking)* "Where did that come from?"

Educator 1: I think it's good. I think it's a good experience.

Educator 4: I know there is concern, for instance, about untracking classes. Concern for me and of course, concern for many parents. I think it is a legitimate concern.

Educator 3: Freshman Math was designed by the math teachers getting together and saying:

Educator 1: *(Standing when speaking)* "If a student took only one math course in their whole high school career, this is what they should know and be able to do."

Educator 3: So the feeling is all students should take and pass Freshman Math before they graduate. The focus of the course is not just the algebra and the geometry and the statistics. It's the team work, group problem solving skills, individual problem solving skills, the thinking processes that take place when you do algebra or solve problems or work in a group.

Educator 4: One of my colleagues told me that the motto for all teachers was:

All Educators: *(Standing when speaking)* "This too shall pass."

Educator 4: When inclusion was introduced a couple years ago, it was the big deal. And it was sold as though we're doing away with grouping and we're going to have these kids in all the classes—it didn't work. We've had kids who can't pass Freshman Math no matter how many times you sit them through it. So you come down to two choices. Either you fail them forever or you pass them when they didn't really learn.

The better alternative in my view was to put together a good basic consumer literacy or business math course that has some meaning to it. When somebody's 16 and can't do his multiplication tables – give him a calculator. Let's teach him what to do when he goes to the store, what to do when they get a loan. I think they'll have to go back to that.

Stage Manager: Our staff has been at the process of trying to come to common understandings about what defines good schools for over ten years now and they're still not there yet. While many of them are still ambivalent about including parents in the planning process, they have recently come to recognize the importance of including them. Lots of things get in our way of developing *shared meanings* with parents. Take, for example, professional knowledge. Our teachers are involved in discussions about education with their colleagues which parents aren't privy to. And as a result, they develop an understanding of "good schools" and a language to describe them which differs from parents. A meeting with parents and educators is in session, let's listen.

To the count of 12 and parents chanting "We want basics," and educators chanting "Metacognition and rubrics," ensemble forms two groups, one of educators and one of parents. They rearrange themselves on stage, educators sitting on stools, parents on chairs.

Parent 1: Non-teaching parents are hard put to maintain their enthusiasm within an atmosphere of "educator-speak" and I have found this to be true in my case. Parent involvement in the reform effort has dropped down to an alarming amount. Professional jargon should be a device to speed communication only within members of that profession. It has no use within a mixed group where non-teaching parents are reluctant to admit ignorance on so many of the terms used by educators. These professional power words are very, *very* uncomfortable when parents are involved in the process. Lots of people have a huge problem with them. They don't want to put up their hand and say

Parent 2: *(Standing when speaking)* "I don't know what you said."

Parent 1: And if you're not careful you can get behind in that understanding. And after a few meetings they say

Parent 2: *(Standing when speaking)* "I don't really know what's going on."

Parent 1: And so the parents drop out.

Educator 1: Sometimes, parents don't understand the professional part of it. Parents aren't involved in the national standards in math and the National Council of Math Teachers. These professional groups want students to do real world math problems instead of just learning the times tables. And parents hadn't been part of that conversation, that's why they were so opposed to it. Their biggest comment was:

All Parents: "When I went to school I did it this way."

Stage Manager: That's what Peter Senge calls "mental models."

Peter Senge: "What we carry in our heads are images, assumptions, and stories....*Mental models* [are] deeply held internal images of how the world works, images that limit us to familiar ways of thinking and acting....Our mental models determine not only how we make sense of the world, but how we take action" (Senge, 1990, p.174).

Stage Manager: Teachers and parents in Grover's Corners have different experiences with schooling, and therefore have different "mental models" of what goes on in "good" secondary schools. One way of creating shared meanings and common mental models is by involving parents and teachers in joint planning activities so that they can learn together, but Grover's Corners educators are ambivalent about involving parents in conversations about what goes on in good schools.

Educator 2: Parental involvement, defining it. That is tough. Does somebody get to go in there and be the veto power? What happens when they are opposed? Do they just stop everything or is their role just to present their concerns? My feeling is that concerns need to get on the table and that the people who are best equipped to address the concerns—the teachers and administrators— get to do that. We wouldn't have changed the schedule if we were trying to work with the consensus model. We asked "What are the concerns of teachers, students, parents?" Then we made modifications and said "This is how we're going to address those concerns."

Educator 4: That's been one of my frustrations all along with some of the curriculum changes that have come down. That there's been no opportunity to debate in front of the public. The administration in education, not only here but everywhere, talks a good game about wanting a variety of opinions—this and that. But they really don't. What's funny is if you had a debate out in the community about educational change, if you will, I think the majority of the teachers would side with change probably philosophically. But the majority of the public wouldn't. See, I consider myself in a majority.

Educator 3: Parent involvement in the beginning? It was minimal. It was minimal. So we ended up being the snake oil salesman again trying to go out and say, "Here, this is what we have done." When we were writing our student outcomes, we invited them in, and we had them clustered in the rooms and shared our ideas with them, but we didn't have any real vehicle for two-way communication. So knowing what we know now, I would definitely have had the parents go over the outcomes in tandem with the staff and have them more involved in developing them.

Educator 1: It would be fairly rare in modern medicine for doctors to bring their patients together and ask them which kind of technique or chemicals would best help the healing process. Now it may be worthwhile to bring patients together about service issues and fee issues and how comfortable they feel with the doctor – that might be important – but the technical aspects are left to the doctors. Why is education different? Because most people in our society have a high school education, there's an assumption that most people are educational experts even though that isn't the case. And so there's a level at which there's some kind of automatic democratization of the profession. Overall, I think that's good. But I think one of the questions that we don't ask is "In what ways are parents most effectively involved in the educational process?"

Educator 2: I share the opinion that parents should trust educators to make the right decisions because they are the professionals. I'll give you some examples. The math program probably would not be in place if we had to go through a consensus model with parents involved. If we had to get parents involved they would have been adamantly against it.

Educator 3: I don't give a tinker's damn what parents think! That's the problem with asking parents for their input. They think that we will use it all – when they're just thinking about what's good for their kid. We have to think about what's good for all kids.

Educator 2: Let me tell you about reforms we have implemented at the high school. One is the math program and one is the social studies program. Now these are major, MAJOR fundamental thrusts forward in American education. If we had yielded to the immediate reaction of the most vocal part of the community, we would have put water on a spark that may be one of the most powerful fires, if you will, in education reform. As difficult as it would be for me to say this directly to parents (I guess I would because it would be a lack of integrity for me not to) there is a need for educators who have thought carefully about these ideas to put them into practice and then to get feedback from parents. Schools are democratic – but only democratic up to a point.

Stage Manager: Some parents remember their joint planning experiences with school people in a positive way...

Parent 3: I absolutely felt that I was listened to and respected. And it was not just as a token either. At first I thought, "well they just need a parent and I'm willing to do it, so I'm elected." But actually I've made suggestions at different times and they've been implemented. I've also learned a great deal. I went in with some preconceived notions – things that I thought were wrong. For instance, I was concerned about exhibitions because I thought it was going to be something teachers hide behind. Then at one meeting they had the rubrics, that was a key thing to me that built my confidence back up because the rubric spells out everything the child needs to do so the teacher, the child, and the parents can see exactly what the child can and cannot do. I like that.

Stage Manager: But other parents' memories cast a negative light on the experience – increasing the mistrust parents feel towards educators.

Parent 2: I got more involved with some of the changes in the high school when the high school started some radical reorganization changes. They'd send home memos inviting parents to attend these public meetings. I'd read the memo and it was quite clear what the intent was and how this thing was going to work. Then you'd go to one of the public hearings and it was almost like, wait a minute, we're not even on the same topic. It was obvious from the responses to the questions that they had presented it in a particular light to sell the concept. And then when you'd get into a group of parents and other teachers and open the thing up and start discussing it, it was obvious that a lot of the information that should have been presented had been deliberately omitted to try to skew things in a particular direction.

Parent 3: I think they invite us to meetings with the attitude "We're going to do it...

Parent 4: *(Standing when speaking)* ...whatever new thing they're proposing this time...

Parent 3: ...we've just got to make sure we sell the concept in the public discussion. That way when the parents leave, they're all nodding their heads saying

All Parents: "Well, that's a good idea."

Parent 3: I think they put a lot of effort into doing that, and I'm not really sure that's wrong to do things that way. But I think it is if you're presenting it as a public discussion and soliciting input, it really is under false pretense.

Parent 4: The junior high had been having some meetings. That's why I called. I got a notice the junior high was going to meet and I said, "Well when the high school starts having meetings I'd like to be called" and I never heard anything. I wanted to be in on the high school planning team, no matter what happened, so when I called about it, he said

Educator 1: *(Standing when speaking)* "I'll take your name"

Parent 4: ...and I never heard any more. I asked and somebody said

Educator 1: *(Standing when speaking)* "Well, they have enough people."

Parent 4: So I just let it go.

Parent 3: There's another interesting little piece. Sometimes, it seems that if you volunteer to be on a committee, if they think it will be to their benefit to have you there, they will invite you. If they, for whatever reason, don't want to deal with you on a committee, they won't invite you...you don't know when the meetings happened and you don't know what happened.

Parent 2: I think there definitely has been a gap developing between the groups, the townspeople and the school people. I think they really need to start including parents in the planning from the ground up and ask

All Educators: "Would you like to be on a study committee?"

Parent 2: And really let some of the townspeople start on the ground level rather than having the thing already outlined in a ten page document with a predetermined outcome.

Parent 1: Well, I've been on a planning team from the ground up. Let me tell you about it. Last week I was at the planning meeting. There were 23 of us around the table. I was the only non-teacher parent present. Generally there are no more than three or four of us, maximum. Now you also have to understand that if 20 of them are teachers in the Grover's Corners system and you've got the superintendent of education there, the high school principal there, all of these people....you do not have 20 independent minds. These are all employees and if a teacher feels strongly against an idea he or she has got to be fairly confident before they put up a hand and say

Educator 2: *(Standing when speaking)* "Wait a minute, wait a second here, I don't think this works because..."

Parent 1: So, there is a "group think" going on. You know, it's the way you all wind up going to a restaurant you'd rather not go to because nobody stood up and said "I don't want to go out to a restaurant." Either there's so much agreement between themselves that debate isn't necessary or else they are reluctant as a group to debate the issues. I mean the group I'm involved with, very well intended, hard-working conscientious people, are reluctant to say "I think this stinks." I certainly wouldn't couch it in those words, and yet progress would be made if a few involved, if a few of the teachers based on 25 years experience of teaching would say

All Educators: *(Standing when speaking)* "I think this stinks."

Parent 1: There's nothing wrong with that.

Stage Manager: Time is also a barrier. Parents and educators both lament the time school planning takes.

Educator 3: The change that I guess I disagree with is that the teachers have less student contact. I think we've had more meetings that were supposedly making us better professionals, and in some cases they do. More committees, more proposals – all those things take us away from the kids. And although some of those do some wonderful things, we've got a lot out of them, we've got to look at what our mission is in the long run. It's hard to balance. There just isn't enough time.

Parent 4: If they were to come to me and ask me my opinion, as you did, I would be very willing to do that. I would be very willing to give it. But because of time constraints and my activities surrounding my son outside of school, I'm not sure how much more I could do.

Parent 1: In common with most civic work in committee, progress is painfully slow and each participant is careful to grant respect and courtesy to another member's position or opinion. This tends to lead to extreme hair splitting within discussions on any aspect.

Educator 2: I think we could have done more of sending out something to parents. I think our communication tended to come after the fact to inform them of these changes rather then involve them in these changes. I don't know how it would have worked that other way but in looking back it may have slowed us down even more. And I think we felt it was time we had to move. We had to act.

Stage Manager: *(To audience)* Time seems to be one of those major barriers which keeps getting in the way of both parents and educators. Scholars such as Paul Hill tell us that:

Paul Hill: Schools [must] have the chance to develop a sense of common purpose and reciprocal obligation among students, faculty, administration and parents (Hill, 1990, p.76).

Stage Manager: *(To Audience)* ...but they don't tell us how. *(To Paul)* Considering all of the obstacles, Paul, how will schools develop a "common purpose"? Will educators be willing to take the time to redefine professionalism to mean learning with parents? Will parents and educators be willing to take the time to uncover their different mental models, to debate alternative ones, and to recreate common ones? Will parents and educators be willing to rethink the roles that parents should play in the planning process? Can a foundation of trust and mutual respect be established, because, after all, without trust and respect for each other, none of this can happen.

Educator 1: I think teachers basically are frightened to contact parents because I think it holds them accountable. Also, I think that we hear stories about certain parents at times, and it puts us on the defensive. It's tough to deal with sometimes. I also think parents are frightened to come in to talk to teachers.

Educator 2: It is often suspected that for some reason teachers have ulterior motives for wanting to make changes. The public has a hard time believing that we are looking out for the best interest of their children.

Educator 4: I think that parents felt they weren't being listened to, that's all. I think lots of people thought that the decision was made even before they were asked for their input.

Educator 3: An ideal relationship between parents and teachers has to be based on some mutual respect, mutual trust— that we understand their point of view, they understand ours. Not that being skeptical is bad, but there's got to be that underlying trust that we're trying to do the best job we can do. It's when it appears that trust isn't there, from either side, or that we're not listening to them or we're not listening to their interest, that we have gotten into trouble with each other.

Stage Manager: That was exactly the point Seymour Sarason made—that without trust and respect, nothing can be accomplished. Isn't that right Seymour?

Seymour Sarason: Everything we know about school-community, professional-nonprofessional relationships (in the past and now) permits the prediction of problems, among which the absence of trust and respect is the most troublesome (Sarason, 1995, p. 66).

Stage Manager: What do you think? Do you agree with Seymour that there is an absence of trust and respect between parents and educators and that is the first thing that must be attended to in this process? How can we create a climate of mutual trust and respect? If we are successful in doing this will all the other barriers of professional prerogative, parental self-interest, time, differences in language and differences in knowledge-bases be more easily attended to? Is it possible for parents and educators to come together, to devote the time to rebuilding a foundation of trust and respect, to address the thorny problems inherent in changing schools, all of which are necessary to reach common ground? It's your turn now, what do you think? Please join us in a conversation about the issues raised in this presentation as well as about this mode of data representation.

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Notes

[1] Written with apologies to Thornton Wilder, author of *Our Town*, a play also set in a New England town (Wilder, 1938). The town in this study is rooted in memories of life in small town New England and is reminiscent of the Grover's Corners created by Wilder. It is for this reason that I, with much humility, use allusions from Wilder's play throughout this study.

[2] Mental models, according to Peter Senge (1990) are unarticulated images in the mind which influence attitudes and actions.

Author's note:

Since publication of this article in 1996, the readers theater script reprinted in this volume has been used with parents, teachers and preservice students in a variety of locations and in a variety of ways. Two other teacher educators, Susan Finley of Michigan State University and Kelli Jo Kerry Moran of Eastern Arizona College and I have used the script in our teacher education classes as a way of provoking our students to think in new ways about teacher/parent relationships. We collected student responses to the presentations and are in the process of analyzing them for a future paper. We also wrote a readers theater performance piece reflecting on our work and presented it at the 1999 business meeting of the Arts and Learning Special Interest Group of the American Educational Research Association. In addition, the script has been translated into Spanish by the Los Angeles Unified School District and used as part of the Parent Curriculum Project of the University of California at Los Angeles. That project is described in my 1999 book, coauthored with Anne Wescott Dodd, *Making Our High Schools Better: How Parents and Teachers Can Work Together*. I invite you to use the script with teachers, parents and/or preservice students and to let me know in what ways you used it and how it was received. I may be reached at konzal@tcnj.edu.

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Recommendations for Research on the Effectiveness of School, Family, and Community Partnerships

Nancy Feyl Chavkin

With the United States Department of Education offering a webpage devoted to the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education and the National Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPAR) working on learning how to "scale up" good partnership practices, "partnership" seems to be the buzzword of the nineties. In addition, The Goals 2000: Educate America Act and the change in eligibility for Title I funding requiring school-family "compacts" represent major national legislation that has pushed partnerships to the forefront of national priorities. At the local level, educators have joined the movement enthusiastically by expanding traditional parent involvement programs to include community collaborations and partnerships. Despite this seemingly universal acceptance of partnerships, a key question remains: Can we make a case for school, family, and community partnerships based on research? We need to know if there is a research basis for promoting school, family, and community partnerships, and if there is not one, we need to develop a sound research agenda to make the case. We need to go further than just finding out if school, family, and community partnerships are helping education; we also need to know how, when, and which parts of the partnership are improving education. Otherwise, these valuable school, family, and community partnerships will become just another educational fad before we have used them effectively.

The intent of this article is to explore what we have learned about school, family, and community partnerships from research and what we still need to learn. Having worked in the education community for more than twenty-five years and being actively involved in several partnerships, I was inquisi-

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tive about what the research literature was telling the public about the value of school, family, and community partnerships. I began the search for answers by going first to very accessible journal and periodical literature and then proceeding to the academic researchers. This article contains both a description of the search for answers and a summary of the major recommendations. Because of the overwhelming increase in the number of educational partnerships and their widespread acceptance as educational solutions, we have reached a critical point. It is now time for closer scrutiny about the status of the research agenda.

Terminology

The Random House Dictionary of the English Language (1987) defines partnership as "the state or condition of being a partner; participation; association; joint interest" (p. 1415), but the word means many different things to people. Synonyms include words such as coalition, collaboration, cooperation, alliance, association, affiliation, merger, and connection. Franklin and Streeter (1995) make the point that different words describe different levels of commitment. Their conceptualization puts the word "partnership" in the middle of a five-part continuum (informal relations, coordination, partnership, collaboration, and integration) where participants move from little or no change in the basic philosophy of the system to systemic change in how all the participants operate. For this article, partnership is defined according to Franklin and Streeter's definition; i.e. when schools, families, and communities have agreed to work together with a formal plan to develop initiatives that will improve education.

Research and evaluation are two different terms, but they are closely linked and will not be separated in this article. Although one might argue that evaluation is conducted in a more value-laden, political context, educational evaluation and research are both conducted with the goal of studying the design, process, and effects of interventions.

The Current Status of Partnerships

I went to the major databases for educational research studies and descriptions of partnerships and was at first overwhelmed by the number of times the word "partnership" turned up on the computer screen. On the first request for articles in the ERIC literature from 1986-97, the result was 6,187 documents containing the word "partnership." Obviously, that was too broad of a search term, and thus the term was further narrowed by adding "educational partnerships," "community partnerships,". "research," and "evaluation." Still, the database yielded more than 800 articles. It was only when the terms were delimited to school, family, or community partnerships and research or evaluation that the numbers of articles became more manageable.

After the initial search of the ERIC literature, I had high expectations of finding many thoughtful studies on the research and evaluation of school, family, and community partnerships. This enthusiasm did not last long. When I started to read the studies, something was missing. Despite the fact that words such as "research" or "evaluation" were in the titles or subject listings, these articles were primarily editorial-type articles touting the benefits of partnerships without any mention of specific research or evaluation studies. Many of the articles were descriptions of one partnership in a community; these articles contained glowing praises of the results that were going to happen. Sometimes there were brief case studies or vignettes, but rarely were any specific research designs or evaluations presented. The word partnership was indeed a "buzzword," but there were few studies documenting how the partnership was responsible for students' success. I went on to several additional databases including the periodical literature only to find the same pattern of descriptive or editorial articles.

After eliminating duplicate articles, I examined 125 articles from 1990-97 that appeared in journal or periodical literature with the terms school, family, or community partnership and research or evaluation, in the title or subject. Interestingly, 91 (72.8%) of these articles were opinions and summaries of several partnership programs with reputed success. Another 31 articles (24.8%) were descriptions of individual partnership programs, and only 3 (2.4%) were actual research-based articles. Obviously, the research literature is not located in the periodical and journal databases; these sources contain primarily descriptive and editorial (opinion) articles.

Recognizing the many limitations of this initial (and non-exhaustive) search of the journal and periodical literature, I decided to see what other researchers had to say about the research in the field of school-family-community partnerships. I believed that my search was too cursory and invalid because I had not searched the elusive literature found in reports and non-published sources and had not included books in the search. Perhaps my terms were not appropriate or perhaps the databases were not inclusive of all the research studies. For a field so prominent in the public agenda, I conjectured that there must be a strong research base that I had not located.

Reviews of Partnership Research

Upon further search, I discovered that many of the research reviews of partnerships are embedded in an elusive set of literature that carries a variety of titles such as collaborative services, family involvement, partnerships, school-linked services, comprehensive programs, and integrated delivery systems. Many of the writings are either advocacy such as Schorr's 1988

Within Our Reach: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage or how-to-do-it manuals such as Melaville and Blank's 1993 *Together We Can: A Guide to Crafting Community-based, Family-Centered Strategies for Integrating Education and Human Services.* There are several national reports (e.g., National Association of State Boards of Education, 1991; Council of Chief State School Officers, 1991; National School Board Association, 1988) or calls for action such as the recent America Goes to School, Family Involvement Partnership for Learning initiative that includes more than 140 family, school, community, religious, and business organizations supporting educational partnerships.

Knapp (1995) uses the term "thin" to describe the methodology literature to date about how to study partnerships, and his view was supported by my beginning search of the literature. Dryfoos (1994) in *Full Service Schools,* working in the field of school-linked services, and Weiss and Greene (1992), working in the field of family support, were some of the first to argue that the traditional methodological approaches are not appropriate for partnership literature. Recently, the Harvard Family Research Project (1997) published an annotated bibliography, *The Guide to Results-Based Accountability,* in order to keep abreast of new ideas in the area of research on collaborative efforts. Much of this literature is also reports from national organizations (e.g., Council of Governors' Policy Advisors, 1991; National Center for Service Integration, 1994; Improved Outcomes for Children Project and the Center for the Study of Social Policy, 1995).

To narrow my search, to the area of school-family-community partnerships, I began by re-reading a familiar and widely-cited report on a closely related topic, family involvement in education, by Henderson and Berla (1995). In *The Family is Critical to Student Achievement,* Henderson and Berla updated two earlier publications from 1981 and 1987 on the research literature regarding family involvement and student achievement and concluded that "the field has become a growth industry." Indeed, they found many more reports of a positive correlation between family involvement in education and increases in student achievement. Don Davies, the former president of the Institute for Responsive Education, praised the report for providing a compilation of research in "a succinct, readable and credible fashion."

The 66 studies that Henderson and Berla report on cover the following: programs and interventions at the early childhood/preschool, elementary school, and high school level; school policies; and family processes such as family behavior and background and family relations with school. The authors state that the studies strongly suggest that family involvement in education leads to student success in school and in life. They report that the studies clearly document benefits for students, families, schools, and communities.

Next, I found authors who differed somewhat with Henderson and Berla's conclusion about the strength of the family involvement research. Baker and Soden (1997) took an evaluative look at the family involvement in education literature when they reviewed 211 articles (66 non-empirical and 145 empirical papers). They found much-promising theory but significant gaps in the research. The 145 empirical studies were evaluated according to four methodological issues: (1) design; (2) isolation of parent involvement from other treatment effects; (3) the definition of parent involvement; and (4) the use of objective measures to assess parent involvement.

Baker and Soden (1997) looked at each of the designs in the empirical studies using the seven threats to internal validity described by Campbell and Stanley (1963) and found that most of the research contained serious flaws. Only three experimental studies employed randomized procedures. They also considered the extent to which the variable of parent involvement efforts was isolated from other kinds of adult involvement or from other aspects of an intervention or program. In addition, the researchers examined the definition of parent involvement. Very few studies had the same operational definition; some studies focused on behaviors and others on attitudes or parenting styles. Lastly, Baker and Soden considered whether the research used objective measurement or merely self-report. Only about 25% of the studies used observation, attendance records, or participation reports; the other 75% used self-report or teacher-report.

Baker and Soden (1997) offer seven specific suggestions and one overarching recommendation for future research in family involvement that could be extended to research about school-family-community partnerships. Based on their comprehensive and critical review of the literature on family involvement and student achievement, they suggest the following: use of experimental procedures; isolation of the specific effects of parent involvement; clarification of operational definition; objective measurement of parent behavior; accurate representation of family influences; examination of differential effects of gender; and analysis of complex patterns of association.

Baker and Soden's overarching recommendation for future research concerns specifying optimal parent involvement. They believe that their critical review of the literature highlights the need for refining both the theory and the analyses of parent involvement. They suggest that there are key areas that need greater specificity such as the optimal location, amount, and range of parent involvement and who the beneficiaries of parent involvement are. Although they focused on the narrower field of family involvement rather than more complex school-family-community partnerships, their work suggests the need to be clear about the connection between the theory of parent involvement and the types and levels of family involvement and the outcomes desired.

Two other researchers, Knapp (1995) and Epstein (1996), wrote about the problems with evaluating partnerships. Knapp wrote about the general field of complex, comprehensive services, and Epstein wrote specifically about school, family, and community partnerships.

Knapp's 1995 provocative article in *Educational Researcher* was titled with a question: How shall we study comprehensive, collaborative services for children and families? He presented five sets of issues that are critical to researchers and evaluators of family-school-community partnerships. These issues include: (1) divergent participants' perspectives; (2) the independent variable; (3) the outcome; (4) attribution; and (5) the study process. These issues are critical to understanding partnerships.

Knapp says that we must first learn how to work with the many different groups that are involved with the partnership. Addressing this first issue is not simple because often different disciplines are involved and there are differences between those who are doing the research and those who are being studied. Many times there are political and contextual issues to consider because most school, family, and community partnerships are inherently public. The second issue, what Knapp refers to as "the elusive independent variable," is also difficult. The word partnership has different meanings to different people – sometimes it is linked to coordination, sometimes collaboration, sometimes joint or shared services. Partnerships are also supposed to be flexible and changing to meet the needs of the client. What exactly is the independent variable? And if the independent variable is confusing, then what about the third issue, the dependent variable or the outcome? Is the outcome academic achievement, social well-being, an improved school climate, or a stronger partnership? There are many more possibilities for outcomes. The fourth issue, attribution, is always a difficult one for researchers. Can we be sure that it is the partnership causing the improvement in outcome? When will we be able to make confident claims about the effects of partnerships? The fifth issue, the relationship between the researchers and participants in a partnership, is not an impossible issue, but it can make the relationship between participants and service providers more complex and intrusive.

Epstein (1996) takes a positive perspective as she examines the history of research and policy on school, family, and community partnerships. Calling partnerships "an emerging field of study," she looked at studies from the late 1960s and early 1970s, during which time the argument was whether schools or families were more important. In addition to the change in the nature of the debate, there were changes in family and community conditions that were in response to poverty, demographics, family demands, equity, and excellence. She notes the changes in the research community by discussing the National Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning, the International Network of more than 300 scholars who gathered to share work on this topic, and the need for the American Education Research Association (AERA) to add multiple labels to index presentations on school, family, and community partnerships. AERA's Families as Educators Special Interest Group (recently renamed The Family, School, Community Partnerships Special Interest Group) has grown in membership for more than a decade, and every major social science and policy-related professional association has included the topic of partnerships at its annual meeting, often with panels and research teams from interdisciplinary perspectives.

Epstein also calls the study of a school, family, and community partnerships "a maturing field" which will "generate heat as well as light" (p. 212). She feels the emerging field of school-family-community partnerships is strengthened by three characteristics of the participants and their work. First, because the academic disciplinary boundaries have blended, the research has improved our understanding of this complex issue. Second, because professional boundaries have blurred, practitioners, policymakers, and researchers are learning more from each other, and the very nature of how research is designed, conducted, and interpreted has changed. Third, the research questions have changed for the better. We are no longer asking if families are important; we are now acknowledging that families and communities are important and asking how can they work together so that students benefit the most.

Recommendations

This author's cursory look at the partnership literature falls far short of what is needed if we are to understand the relationship between research and evaluation studies and school-family-community partnerships. What this general literature did show, however, was enthusiastic support for partnerships. The educational researchers with their reviews of existing literature tell us we have much more to learn about the complex nature of partnerships. The authors all agreed that we did not know enough about school-family-community involvement, but they differed on exactly how we should make the case for school, family, and community partnerships. The following nine recommendations are offered as first steps in helping further the research agenda.

Multiple, detailed case studies are an appropriate beginning.

Because school-family-community partnerships deal with complex relationships, they demand a baseline of repeated measures. Descriptions of both individual participation and of partnership participation are needed. These two descriptions are similar yet different; the former focuses on individuals and families and the latter on the program and partnership work.

Partnership research needs to begin with descriptive studies and case histories and then moving forward with longitudinal and controlled studies. Knapp (1995) says that the constructive skeptic never believes that a partnership will actually accomplish what it says it will do, and thus a good design calls for a baseline of repeated measure over time prior to participation in the partnership and during the partnership. He suggests that researchers can also use single-subject and single-system, time-series research to demonstrate the bottom-line outcomes of partnerships.

Define your terms precisely.

This recommendation was echoed constantly by the reviewers; most of the existing research does not make it clear who or what the "partnership" is. The independent variable of partnership is often not defined clearly. Another problem is the definition of community; how do we find a descriptor of the community we are talking about in our school-family-community partnership? Baker and Soden (1997) suggest that most researchers are not clear about what they mean by terms like "parent involvement." Do they mean reading to children? coming to school? raising funds? There is a need to define optimal partnership activities and describe the locale and range of activities that are included in the partnership.

Be clear about the outcomes you are seeking.

It is critical to specify what results you are seeking with the partnership effort. It needs to be clear whether the goal is student achievement, a better school climate, or more community support. When one looks at results and outcomes, it is important to acknowledge that different types of activities within partnerships lead to different outcomes for students, parents, and educators, especially in the short term. Epstein (1996) makes it clear that working on parenting skills may not be clearly linked with student achievement in the short term, but it may first affect the interaction of families with their children and later affect the student's achievement. Gomby and Larson (1992) provide detailed lists of possible outcomes for the student, the school, the family, and the community, and these can be used as starting points.

One way that many partnerships have used to help clarify their outcomes is to draw a picture of what their assumptions are about the partnership. Many evaluators call this a logic model, a blue print, or graphic depiction because it shows the relationship between goals, outcomes, actions, and assumptions. These linkages are critical to understanding what we know about the target population and the systems that will serve them. Alter and Murty (1997) offer helpful insights about how to use logic modeling to evaluate partnerships.

Understand the relationship between the theory of the school-family-community partnership and the partnership activities.

The reviewers were in clear agreement on the need for a stronger conceptual base about how partnerships worked and what the relationship of this theory was to specific partnership activities. In the case of school-family-community partnerships, Epstein's (1996) theory of overlapping spheres of influence needs to be clearly articulated and understood by all partners. Epstein's recommendations for research are embedded with the theory of overlapping spheres of influence. Studying points of transition from one grade level to the next or from one school to the next suggests studying the concept of change. Understanding the theory behind the partnership helps design appropriate research and evaluation activities. Examining points of transition and the relationships between spheres of influence calls for something very different than experimental design, which does not allow for the flexibility and constant change inherent in partnerships.

Hooper-Briar and Lawson (1994) also discuss the necessity for a theoretical framework in partnerships and collaboratives. They stress the dialogue about this guiding vision must begin with the family stakeholders and include all participants in the partnerships. Freeman and Pennekamp (1988) call this step developing a shared theoretical map to improve practice. Building on Alter and Murty's logic modeling, all participants in a partnership can understand more about how the specific partnership activities link to theory. These theoretical assumptions should be driving the program activities, and the evaluation research will test the accuracy of these assumptions. If the results do not improve, either the theoretical assumptions were wrong or an anticipated activity did not take place. If the program's activities are not addressing the theory of the partnership, then the partnership needs to reexamine the logic model.

Involve participants in partnership research.

Designing the research collaboratively is another key recommendation that is repeated by the authors. Starting from the "bottom up" helps the researcher understand what is happening in the partnership and receive constructive criticism of the measures and the process being used to collect data. In addition, Epstein (1996) asks, what is the role of the student in this research? The student needs to be considered as an active learner and a variable in the research process. Finally, she says that the concept of how researchers collaborate with educators and policymakers to make the research meaningful must be considered. Epstein calls for "sharing the role of expert."

Isolate the specific parts of partnerships in your studies.

It will be necessary to isolate the parts of the partnership process at some point in the study in order to examine more fully the role that each part plays in the partnership. For example, it is important to know how well the tutoring program is working, if the mentoring program is effective, or if the business involvement has improved community relations. In addition, Knapp (1995) suggests that researchers look at both quantitative and qualitative analyses of the cost of the partnerships. Recognizing that partnerships are complex, he suggests that cost is a crucial question that gets forgotten because researchers have two difficulties—disentangling partnerships costs from ongoing costs and characterizing what the word "cost" really means to the parts of the partnership.

As partnerships try to isolate specific parts of the partnership, it is often helpful to use an outcome indicator plan. A typical outcome indicator plan has four dimensions of performance measurement: quantity of effort; quality of effort; quantity of effect; and quality of effect. These four dimensions are best understood by examining them in a multidimensional grid where you look at both inputs and outputs from the perspective of both quanity and quality. The Casey Outcomes and Decision-Making Project (1998) adapted a useful model for core child welfare outcome indicators based on the earlier work of Friedman (1997).

Use objective measures rather than self-report measures whenever possible.

Baker and Soden (1997) recommended that researchers look beyond self-reports of progress and use objective measures. The limitations on reliability and validity of self-report measures compromise the research on partnerships. In addition to some standardized measures, direct observation can be helpful in counting interactions and documenting behavioral changes. Gomby and Larson (1992) recognize that many partnerships focus on changes in attitudes but caution that changes in attitudes don't always lead to changes in behaviors. They suggest that although self-report paper-and-pencil surveys are easy, they are not always the most predictive of changes.

Keir and Millea (1997), however, caution that programs should not collect data just because it is available. The data may not be closely linked to the outcomes. Partnerships need to be clear about the outcomes they are seeking when they select measures.

Consider levels of intervention.

Some families and community organizations are on the rosters as partners but they do not actively participate in partnership activities. It is important

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to gauge the differences in these groups. In the School Development Project (SDP), Haynes and Emmons (1997) have come up with a reasonable alternative for evaluation studies; they now determine the level of implementation of SDP-like processes in each school and then proceed with the evaluation. In this way, Haynes and Emmons are able to account for the level of saturation and to truly examine the relationship of the implementation level to student outcomes. Keir and Millea (1997) found that it was critical to distinguish between students who received intensive services in the School of the Future Project and those that received intermittent services; they recommended that programs track the frequency of services.

Recognize unanticipated benefits.

Another promising practice cited by Knapp (1995) is an investigation of success. He suggests that careful study of the typical practices and the conditions that support these practices in exemplary partnerships offers research new perspectives for identifying what is working. In the School of the Future Project, Keir and Millea (1997) describe the unexpected benefits that came from training and involving parents in the data collection process. The goal had been to reach out to parents and to draw them into the project; what happened was that community members with leadership, public speaking, and advocacy skills emerged. These community members were able to conduct and analyze other surveys in their own community and took on additional community-service responsibilities.

Conclusion and Cautionary Note

Knapp (1995) says that there are several approaches that he doesn't think will work. He believes it is too early for meta-analyses because there are no commonly-defined independent variables or outcome measures. He suggests that correlational investigations using factor-analytic studies will not work well with partnerships because the very nature of the collaborative design leads to many variables being related spuriously. In addition, he believes that it is too early to push for group-comparative experimental studies comparing recipients and non-recipients because the researcher must prove that the treatment is identifiable and uniform and the recipients and nonrecipients are comparable. These kinds of forced research and evaluation studies will change the nature of developing partnerships into more of a scientific experiment than an emerging partnership.

Epstein (1996) suggests that the results of previous studies have laid the groundwork for future research by generating many new questions. She suggests that much more work needs to be done, particularly with clearer questions, better data, stronger measurement models, more refined analyses, and more useful results. She lists five topics that are particularly compelling and need further study. These five topics include the following: examining points of transition within the partnership and within schooling levels as students enter different grade units; exploring the results or consequences of specific partnership activities; defining the components of community; studying the roles of students in their own educational success; and having researchers collaborate with policy leaders and educators.

It is important to bear in mind Kennedy's (1997) conclusion that much of the problem with the gap between research and practice actually "stems from false expectations" (p. 10). Readers of research often want clear rules of what to do and when to do it. Research has not been able to fulfill that expectation and probably never will. The answer about what kind of research or evaluation is appropriate may depend more on the individual partnership than on predetermined research designs; there is no one easy recipe for every partnership to follow. There are so many political, contextual, and financial issues that impact the kinds of research partnerships can conduct. We cannot forget that many times the partnerships are based on soft money and the creative energy of a small group of dedicated educators; outside factors such as accreditation, funding, and curriculum issues become barriers to the successes of the partnership. Ucelli (1997) commented that "the challenges of partnerships like these are formidable"; conducting research about partnerships in these contexts will be difficult. We will need to keep participants actively involved in the research process beginning with the design, and that new role will not be easy for researchers, educators, families, or community members.

In sum, we do not yet have a strong research base supporting school-family-community partnerships. If we want to make the case for partnerships, we are going to have to develop new research strategies to do it because partnerships are complex and wreck havoc with the traditional research methodology. We must be cautious as we consider the best ways to evaluate partnerships; the research needs to be appropriate at the current point in the partnership's development. In the words of Gomby and Larson (1992), "Evaluation of school-linked service initiatives, which are characterized by great flexibility and variability, is challenging but also possible and desirable" (p. 68). We can and we must move forward with a research agenda for school-family-community partnerships. Someday soon when citizens go to a periodical database, they will find a rich research base not only about the value of school-family-community partnerships, but about which strategies work best when.

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Building a Learning Community through Teacher Action Research: Honoring Teacher Wisdom in Three Chicago Public Schools

Norman Weston

"I couldn't think of a better way to end the school year," said Mary beaming a smile at me. Observing the numerous small clusters of teachers still engaged in animated conversation in the large meeting room and out into the hallway of the Chicago Teachers' Center, I had to agree. Something significant had just taken place. As a veteran teacher and now a Chicago school principal, Mary Cavey had finished out many a school year, but today had been different. It had not felt like the last day of school. With the energy and hum of teachers talking about their action research projects still hanging electric in the air—it felt more like a beginning than an end.

On June 19, 1998, over 100 K-8 teachers from the Illinois Alliance for Achievement Network came together to display, discuss, and visit exhibits which represented the results of over 40 group and individually conducted action research projects. Set up in four rooms and a hallway in the Teachers' Center, colorful tabletop displays had featured examples of student work, project reports, photographs, charts, graphs, newly developed teaching materials, informational handouts, and videos. Topics included:

- Homeless Children;
- Imagery and Its Positive Effects on Education;
- Connecting Mathematics with Musical Sounds;
- Writers Workshop;
- The Student as Storyteller;
- Creating a Web Page;
- A Study of Test Preparation Materials;
- Integrating Music with Study of the Planets;

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- Buddy Reading for Emergent Readers;
- Oral Language Development and Critical Thinking;
- Multiple Intelligences and Learning Centers;
- Motivating Writing Through Art;
- Letter Writing to Promote Self-Esteem, and;
- Peer Tutoring...to name only a few.

At the end of the day, many teachers said they had been inspired both by the projects and by the interactions with their Alliance colleagues: "I found this to be a wonderful learning experience," reported one. "I have always thought that learning should be fun. The Alliance has rekindled my thoughts on learning. For this I am grateful!"

"Today has been a very positive experience in helping me get an overall purpose for the program," said another. "It also was beneficial for me to be exposed to all these great ideas. It recharges and motivates me to try some in the new school year."

Recalling her own impressions of the event, Mary Cavey wrote:

> It was energizing to see how meaningful these projects were to the teachers who worked on them. Walking from exhibit to exhibit, I was impressed by the quality of work and the knowledge gained from every project. Teachers became engaged in meaningful reflective dialogue about what worked and what did not. Teachers also came away from the conference as active learners. The excitement and curiosity to learn became contagious.

The event capped off the first year of a long-term project designed to promote the concept of "learning communities" within and between the three schools. As action research advisor to the project, my purpose in writing this article is to try to better understand what happened to bring about the kind and level of positive energy, excitement, and enthusiasm depicted above. It explores the question: What is it about action research that fosters community in schools? An important second purpose is to document how inner city teachers in Chicago Public Schools became involved in teacher action research, shared their teaching practice, and grew professionally.

The Alliance for Achievement Annenberg Project

A goal of the Alliance for Achievement Network is to break down the traditional hierarchical structures of large urban schools, and replace them with smaller, more intimate groupings, or constellations, of teachers, students, parents, and staff. The belief is that everyone – teachers, parents, and students – learn better in smaller, more personalized learning communities. In pursuit of this vision, in the fall of 1997 three Chicago Alliance schools, Bethune Elementary (560 students; 98% African American), Piccolo Elementary (930 students; primarily Hispanic and African American) and Spry Community School (850 students; predominately Hispanic), in partnership with the Academic Development Institute, the Chicago Teachers' Center, and the Annenberg Challenge, set out on the first year of a three-year project to (1) create a number of small schools, or constellations of teachers and students, within each larger school; (2) provide training in action research to help the small schools and constellations achieve their stated goals, and; (3) unite all of the small schools and constellations within the three larger schools into a symbiotic Network learning community. Specific action research goals were to "generate educational initiatives which draw upon the expertise and creativity of faculty to achieve the school's instructional focus," and to "assess the effectiveness" in achieving those goals. Crucial to the success of the project, a cadre of substitute teachers would be hired to release teachers (two hours in the afternoon for six days from November to May) to learn about, design, and conduct action research. As part of the larger project, the "cadres" would also be involved in creating parent education programs and community sponsored after-school programming for students.

Beginnings and Problematic Questions

My first task was to prepare and conduct two workshops for constellation leaders. (A constellation was defined as "a group of approximately 10 teachers who come together to plan and implement project goals.") The purpose of the first workshop was to introduce constellation leaders to action research; the second was to prepare them to guide their colleagues in action research. Since the workshops could not be scheduled until mid-November, and then again in early January, teachers would have only the second half of the school year in which to conceive, conduct, and report on their research. Meanwhile, a lot was going on.

Because some of the small schools, and nearly all of the constellations were just being created (the project's first initiative), many had not yet begun to formulate their goals and purposes (from which their action research would ideally flow). Also, there were other programs operating in the schools having specific guidelines that teachers had to follow. Two of the three schools were on probation – as part of the Chicago school reform, these programs and curricula were the result of schools having had low test scores and were administered by "outside partners." In addition, team-building exercises and parent education initiatives were also going on as part of the project.

Time was short. At the university, I have two years to work with a cohort group of approximately 15 teachers on their M.Ed. teacher action research projects; now I had less than six months and nearly 100 teachers! I began to think, in order to make this work, I had to present action research to the constellation leaders in a clear and simple way, while yet being true to its basic principles. What's more, after the two training workshops, I would have to rely upon the constellation leaders to keep the process going in their schools. I came to think of this as "action research by remote control."

I very soon realized that doing action research with teachers in the throes of Chicago school reform would not, and could not, be the same as doing action research with suburban teachers seeking master's degrees. Problematic questions began to surface as I started to plan for the first workshop, only a few weeks away: (1) how can I present this new, and fairly radical idea, to teachers who were already feeling under siege, as being something more than "just another thing" for them to do? For this to happen, I knew that I would have to find a way to win their confidence and trust; and (2) how was I going to advise and train this large group of teachers, scattered around three schools, in the basic precepts and methodologies of action research while having only minimal contact with them? (i.e., the "remote control" problem). It was not until quite a bit later that I discovered the answer to this question was to rely on the action research process itself.

Teacher Action Research vs. Institutionalized Action Research

Educational action research focuses on educational practice and its improvement. The term "action research" was coined by social psychologist Kurt Lewin (1947) to describe a mode of inquiry having the following characteristics:

1. It is an activity engaged in by groups or committees with the aim of changing their circumstances in ways that are consistent with a shared conception of human values. As a means of realizing the "common good"—rather than merely individual good—*it strengthens and sustains a sense of community.*
2. It is a reflexive social practice *in which there is no distinction between the practice being researched and the process of researching it.* Social practices are viewed as "theories-in-action" to be reflectively assessed in terms of their potential for realizing worthwhile change (Elliott, 1985, p. 242).

Today, action research is being increasingly used for district, state, and even national educational initiatives. (Caro-Bruce & McCreadie, 1995; Heckman, 1996) However, the purpose is often not to better practice or to increase understanding of an educational situation, but to assess the effectiveness of a particular intervention, typically not of the teacher's choosing. Allan Feldman (1995) has termed this the "institutionalization" of action research. "If there is a purpose for employing action research that supersedes the immediate goal of improvement of practice and the longer-term goal of generating knowledge," says Feldman, "then this vision of action research is institutionalized action research" (p. 190).

Noting the increasing use of the term "action research," longtime teacher and action research advocate, John Elliott (1991), has warned, "there are signs that action research has become hijacked in the service of technical rationality" (p. 52). This was not the kind of action research I believed in; nor was it one I wanted to present to the teachers. Returning to the source, I believe that the three basic principles of action research first put forth by Lewin still hold today: *its participatory nature, its democratic nature, and its merging of scientific inquiry with practice* (Kemmis, 1985). With these principles in mind, I put together my own definition of action research for the opening workshop with the constellation leaders.

Since busy teachers have little time to read up on the latest educational theories, I used language they could relate to and explained action research as:

> ...*taking a risk to change your teaching in some way*. It is active inquiry—something you are going to do differently with your students to improve a situation. The idea is to try something out and see what happens. The action research cycle is one of experimentation, reflection, followed by further action. This kind of "reflection-in-action" is an ordinary part of good teaching; action research is a natural extension of reflective practice.

The First Workshop: Introducing Action Research

The stated purpose and rationale for including action research in the overall project was to "draw upon the expertise and creativity of the faculty to generate educational initiatives." Taking this to heart, I began by saying to the teachers how honored I felt to have been given the opportunity to work with them on this project. I further told them that they possessed a practitioner's wisdom and knowledge that outside "experts" could never have. I knew that they were busy and overwhelmed; I hoped that they would not see this as "just another thing to do," but rather as an opportunity to do something that *they* wanted to do. Sure, I told them, it would be work, but it would be *their work*.

In this initial encounter with the teachers, I tried to address my first concern: Would they see this as something valuable? Would they see this as worth doing and committing precious time to? My approach was to acknowledge the negatives, while holding out the promise—inherent with so much possibility—that this would truly be a project of their own. At the end I knew that I had made an impact, but I was not quite sure what. Later, one teacher said: "At first we were all skeptical about having another thing to do, but as it went along, and we talked more, we were able to come to a topic we were really interested in."

Teachers Teaching Teachers: Trusting in the Dialogue

The purpose of the second workshop, which was attended by almost double the number of teachers present at the first (this, due to the fact that constellations were still being formed), was to prepare the constellation leaders to introduce action research to their constellations. At the first session, each had been given a packet full of handouts, articles, and examples of teacher action research, along with a detailed five-step outline for conducting action research starting with a focus statement and rationale. Since the first workshop, many had become excited about the prospects of doing this kind of research. One had even explored the topic on the Internet.

After answering any questions about the project, or about action research their teachers might have, I asked them to lead a discussion which would explore some general areas or problems of educational practice that the entire group or individual teachers might want to research. The purpose was to help the group collectively identify those areas or situations they felt needed improvement. Using a model by David Forward (1989), I asked them to address the following questions:

- What is happening now?
- How is this a problem?
- Imagine some solutions.
- What resources do we already have?
- What are our boundaries and limitations?
- What do we need?
- How can we begin?

I explained that I did not expect them to have answered all of the questions at the end of this problem-defining session. Beginning the dialogue was what counted. To this end, I offered the following advice: "Do not 'short change' the discussion at this first session. It's important to let people 'have their say.' If not, they will not take ownership of the problem, or of possible solutions. A good rule of thumb, I have found is to listen, respect, and affirm." This was not easy to do, as one constellation leader later recalled:

> As a constellation leader, I learned that you have to be a good delegator. I got overwhelmed at times, but I finally learned to turn things over. I didn't have to control everything. It got easier after that.

Action Research by Remote Control

Giving up control and letting the process do its work was something all of us had to learn—myself, the principals, the constellation leaders—even the teachers. When asked at the final forum what the frustrations of the project had been, one veteran teacher recalled this part of the process:

> One of the frustrations was also one of the rewards; and that was coming up with a problem. We had too many problems! Too many ideas. But pretty soon people started getting a focus and they would go off and plan together, especially the women! After while it was just a few of us unorganized men sitting there talking. We finally came up with a topic. But it was the process...trying to get a topic that I found valuable. I've taught for over 20 years, and for me it was rejuvenating.

At the conclusion of the workshop, much to my surprise, I had received a spontaneous round of applause. I was pleased, but stunned. Looking back, I see this was the first indication of the depth of impact that action research would have on this group of teachers. It was as if they had been starved for some kind of personal and professional recognition for a long time. This was revealed later when I asked one constellation leader what she thought about action research as a vehicle for school reform.

> Well, it is one of the few things I have experienced...with all the new programs and so forth...that allows teachers to have a say in things. It respects what teachers know. You can see that here today.

Being recognized and respected can lead to feelings of efficacy and personal empowerment. "I had never heard about empowerment before this project," said another constellation leader, "but I see action research as empowering the teacher *and* the student. We so seldom have a chance to talk about our own teaching. I discovered a lot of expertise out there!"

Others commented on the power and value of dialogue to create a positive feeling of community which included not only their fellow teachers, but was extended by way of their research projects to encompass students as well. "It was beneficial to collaborate with peers and to let the students know that they were participating in research," said one teacher. Another added: "I learned that cooperating with other teachers can be very rewarding, and that if I let children make some key choices, peace and calm result, not mayhem. (And) that interchanges between classrooms are very beneficial to the kids."

Increased excitement and motivation—for teachers and students alike—can result from the participatory nature of action research. "It's something you do *with* your students, not *to* them," I explained at the first workshop. I emphasized this characteristic in order to help teachers get clear about how action research differs from traditional research. Having picked up on this distinction, one teacher later recalled:

> I learned that not only does action research provide motivation for the students, it also motivates the teacher. From the first day the kids were excited and that made me more motivated to continue, to try to change. You have to get rid of the things that don't work, throw them out, and try some new things. Action research helps you do that.

Having the constellation leaders take responsibility and ownership of the process from the very beginning, I believe, was crucial to the project's success. Ironically, what had at one point appeared to be problematic, turned out to be a necessary element at the very core of the process. Trusting the teachers to go through the process was essential to realizing the product.

Action Research Principles Revealed in Action

In researching for this project, I was influenced by four points, or characteristics, that Feldman and Atkin (1995) used to describe as their "style" of teacher action research. Contained within the principles first set down by Lewin, and then woven into my own "practitioner's" definition of action research, I found each characteristic revealed in either the words or in the actions of the teachers in this project. As though embedded in the process, they are:

1. **It is collaborative.** The collaboration is primarily among teachers, not between teachers and an outside researcher. For this reason, I did not try to steer or influence the focus of the teachers' research. Teachers were allowed ownership both of the projects and of the process of selecting topics to research. In this way, the small schools and constellations were led to develop their own sense of identity and direction. This sense of identity became strong in some groups. I recall showing up to consult with a group one day who looked a little bewildered that I was there. They soon politely told me that they did not know I was coming, and that they already had an agenda set

with work to do. Thinking, "This is just what I had hoped would happen!," I quickly re-packed my bag, sat back and watched their process unfold. (Unfortunately, this same group took on such a large project—self-esteem and character education—that they were unable to put in place all of the ideas they had generated in time for the culminating event.)

In addition to fostering a sense of group identity, teacher collaborations also have the potential of identifying problems, or illuminating areas, that normally do not merit the attention of professional educational researchers. This is because projects are often conceived of in ways that can only be imagined or seen by practitioners. A project entitled "Centro de Escritura" (The Writing Center) is a good example. Seeing that their children did not enjoy writing (the problem), two first-grade teachers combined students from their special education and bilingual classrooms in a project designed to improve the children's writing skills by enticing them to become young authors. A project which used relaxation and visualization techniques as prerequisites to creative writing was another unique approach.

2. **Teachers focus on their own practice, not the practice of others.** In this way, the teacher becomes the subject of her own research. The process is self-reflective. Each teacher begins by asking herself: What is going on in my classroom with my children that could be better? Paradoxically, the process can also foster a sense of professional community with trust at the core. Making these kinds of questions public through dialogue with other teachers can trigger a re-examination of values and assumptions affecting practice. For example, when asked what she had learned from the project, one teacher said:

> I learned that if the project is the teacher's own it is going to work. I also learned that, by talking in our constellation group, we have similar problems. It helps to know that it isn't just me who is having the problem.

Another added:

> I agree. I learned a lot from talking with the teachers in my constellation. What their problems are. . . I also learned a lot about my own strengths and weaknesses. It was the sharing and communication, I think, that was the most valuable. And all of the projects here today.

Self-reflectiveness leads to a third characteristic:

3. **It is self-developmental**. Action research is a form of professional development that begins with, and is fueled by, a teacher's interest. As Feldmam and Atkin (1995) so eloquently state, a classroom teacher's goal is not to add to a theoretical knowledge base, but to "become wiser" about her profession and practice. This is reflected in one teacher's observation:

> A teacher's creativity lies in what she's interested in. Action research, after I got to understand it better, gave me the opportunity, for the first time, to fine tune something I was already doing in my class, but to do it better. I really appreciated that, and I think this is where action research helps the teacher . . .and the children.

Several teachers described their experience with action research using a growth metaphor:

> I feel like with this project that I have planted some seeds that I hope will grow, and that I want to continue with next year. Once I got into the project, I really liked it. So did the kids. It kind of forced you to try something you always wanted to do but never got around to.

Others viewed the developmental aspect of the process in a more difficult, yet positive light: "This experience taught me how difficult teaching is," said one teaching cadre. Another learned "how much of a struggle it is to incorporate your own ideas and also the reward of going through the struggles." The word "struggle," leads to a fourth characteristic:

4. **It has a moral component**. Questions like "What is the best thing to do in this situation?" often lead to "What is the right thing to do?" A project entitled "Homelessness: The Problem of Transience" is an example of the moral dimension that action research can sometimes take. At the year-end event, this project received the most visits of any, as evidenced by the number of written comments left behind by teachers. While most were short: "Very worthwhile project!" and "Great project!," the amount of interest shown in this project reflects an educational situation unique to inner city teaching. Who else, except teachers who have to work with children who are periodically homeless, would even conceive of such a project? In their caretaker's role, these teachers identified and acted on a problem having far deeper meaning and significance than most surface attempts to reform inner city schools by focusing on test scores.

Action Research in the Context of School Reform

Two schools in the project were on probation for having low test scores. Denying this fact would not make it go away. So, rather than let it sit there like the elephant in the room that no one will acknowledge, I decided to bring it up on my first site visit to one of the schools

"How can you do this action research project when you have to be concerned about raising test scores?" I asked this after the group had already met once together to talk about action research. "Well, this all sounds good," I recall one teacher saying, "but the reality is we have to raise those scores." However, after a short period of discussion where the teachers used words like "humiliated," "intimidated," and "denigrated" to describe how they felt about being on probation, invariably someone would bring the conversation back to what it was they wanted to do for their action research. "Listen, respect, and affirm," I thought to myself at the time.

The teachers' show of faith in me, and in the process, convinced me even more that the approach of allowing individual teachers, small groups, or constellations to choose what it was they wanted to research was the correct one. I would trust in the process; the decision would be entirely theirs.

In the end, some teachers and groups did choose to focus on test-related problems. One well-documented project, "A Study of Test Preparation Materials," concluded that these materials were worthwhile for their students, they were not a waste of time, and would be used again next year. What this reaffirmed for me, was that teachers must play a major role in selecting topics for their research – including topics that the research consultant might not be especially excited about!

Trust and faith, both in the teachers and in the principles and processes of action research, are necessary pre-conditions for real and lasting school reform. As one teacher later said:

> I see action research as the "wave of the future" for school reform because it comes from *inside* the school, from the bottom up, not being told this is what we have to do by somebody else. This is the only way reforms will work.

Creating the Conditions for Change

The culture of distrust and suspicion that so often pervades big city schools may also be at the heart of failed efforts at reform in those same schools. A study of 210 schools from the Consortium on Chicago School Research concluded that social trust might be the key factor associated with improving schools (Sebring, Bryk, & Easton, 1995). Similarly, a study of reform activity in 57 urban school districts from 1992-95 found that the apparent failure of reform in these districts was due not to too little reform, but to too much

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(Hess, 1998). Noting that, on average, one significant reform initiative had been launched every three months in these schools, the study recommended that the frantic pace of reform in urban schools be slowed; that schools quit looking to outside "experts" for "quick fix" remedies; and that an "increase emphasis on providing focused, consistent, stable, long-term leadership that cultivates expertise and community in the district schools" be adopted (Hess, 1989, p. 27).

The point is that real and lasting change takes time. It often takes as long to create the *conditions* for change as it does *implementing* change. That is why, in the initial year of this project, a lot of time was spent on getting teachers to trust us, trust each other and to trust the action research process. This was necessary so they would commit to it. Central to establishing trust and commitment was having teachers choose their own topics to research. If we had told the teachers what to research, I am convinced the project would never have gotten off the ground, or have been easily sabotaged by indifference. As it turned out, action research, to those who wholeheartedly embraced the concept, became like an antidote to all that was negative in their professional lives.

Conclusion: Sustaining the Action Research Culture

The barriers and challenges to classroom action research have been identified as the following: the push toward standardization, an emphasis on assessment and accountability, budget pressures, and time (Feldman & Atkin, 1995). Conversely, things I see as needed to sustain a culture of action research are:

1. **Supportive Leadership**: To have a chance of surviving at all, principals and district administrators have to be supportive of the process. With the help of project staff, the principals came to see that teacher action research could be a vital part of professional development and building a quality school.
2. **Time**: Teachers need time to meet and discuss their research on a regular basis. To be sustained, action research cannot be seen by teachers as an add-on. When asked what they would change for next year, many mentioned the need for more time.
3. **Collaboration and Sharing**: Teachers need opportunities to share their research with a wider community. Typically, most teachers work in isolation; unaware even of what others in their own buildings are doing. Collaboration begins within a school, but can expand later. Built-in mechanisms to regularly exchange ideas, share problems, and report progress create the conditions which allow for shared understandings and new

knowledge to emerge within the group, while also reducing feelings of isolation.

4. **Teacher Ownership of the Research**: The chances of action research becoming self-sustaining are slim unless teachers see a potential for improving their own practice as a direct result of the process. It is critical that the research agenda be that of the teachers. Unless the research agenda is her own, a teacher will have little reason or motivation to follow through.
5. **Action Research is Self-Initiated Professional Development**: Action research respects, and is built upon, the unique wisdom and practical knowledge possessed by classroom teachers. It is a process by which teachers begin to systematically focus on their professional practice. An important intrinsic reward for engaging in this process is that it allows teachers to get better at what they do. The motivation thus becomes internal and self-sustaining because the situation, or problem, is their own.
6. **Access to Information**: Part of the action research cycle is gathering information relevant to the topic. While the teachers were able to generate a lot of ideas and problems to investigate, they lacked ready access to sources of information on their topics. Next year, to address this problem, we are working to make Internet connections available within the schools so that teachers might have access to a "library without walls."

Summary and Next Steps

What is clear from the first year of this project is that the concept of action research has been enthusiastically embraced by most of the teachers. The model suggests that increased teacher autonomy has a major role to play in creating and sustaining long-term educational improvement. Teachers' evaluations of the project revealed consensus around four themes: (1) satisfaction in knowing that this was their own work; (2) the value of meeting regularly with other teachers to discuss practice; (3) a desire to connect more often with other Alliance schools, and; (4) to meet together in their constellations more often.

Teacher enthusiasm, energy, and ownership are necessary prerequisites for school improvement. Their appearance signals the first step toward sustained reform. Challenges and questions for the second year of the project become: How to make action research part of the continuing ethos of the school and of the Alliance Network? And, how to build upon the work teachers have done so far? We dare not disregard the teachers' first attempts at action research. To foster a culture of action research in schools, teachers need to feel that their research efforts are ongoing, continuous, and connected. Seeds have been planted.

Final Thoughts

"You didn't think we could do this, did you?" said Marta. She was standing there looking up at me as a video of her research project on cooperative grouping was playing in the background. Marta is a special education teacher with a lot of experience. "We worked 15 minutes a day, every day, putting this together," she continued, obviously proud. "It was a lot of work!" "No," I said, "I *knew* you could do it." We both had a good laugh. I was surprised at Marta's remark, though. Because never once did it occur to me that she, or any of the other teachers, could not do this work. That they might *choose* not to do it, yes; but never that they could not.

It seems that the primary attribute that an action research facilitator has to have is an unwavering faith and confidence in teachers' abilities to not only do such work, but to *want* to do it. Central to creating a culture of action research, and the attendant learning community in which it is held, is establishing and nurturing a climate of trust, expectation, and honesty. I never told the teachers that action research would be easy, nor that it would even work. I simply said that I respected them and their knowledge, and that this was a chance to explore something that they were truly interested in. Authenticity, trust, and dialogue I now recognize were the keys to the success of the event that introduced this article. As an outsider, I had the opportunity to become a catalyst for a process that one teacher described as a "point of departure for a long but positive destiny in education." From the inside, said Mary Cavey:

> Surely this experience indicates what is at the heart of whole school change. Teachers involved in activities that promote genuine professional discovery as we journey together building stronger learning communities.

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Proactive Thoughts on Creating Safe Schools

Constance M. Perry

Since the tragic deaths in school shootings across the United States, much more attention has centered on school violence and ways to make schools safe. Even as the 1998 Annual Report on School Safety by the US Department of Education and US Department of Justice reports that the overall school crime rate has declined since 1993 and fewer students are bringing weapons to school, people's concern has risen ("A Primer on School Safety," 1998). That such violence has occurred on school property, in rural America, has shocked millions. The belief that "it can't happen here" has been shaken. Complacency has been replaced by fear. No longer is school violence seen as only an inner-city problem. It can and has happened in a variety of locales across the United States, and many educators, educational organizations, government policy makers, and ordinary citizens are wondering how to prevent violence in all schools.

Metal detectors, student I.D. badges, security guards, locker searches, and zero-tolerance policies are some of the methods being implemented to curb violence. These reactive measures may indeed reduce or prevent weapons from being used in schools, but a much broader, more proactive approach seems to be needed if violence is to be curbed for the long term. "Schools that impose order, rather than cultivating it, may win no more than an uneasy truce while at the same time losing the hearts and minds of their students" (Gaddy, 1987, pp. 28 - 29). Building a more respectful, caring learning environment could be a long-term proactive answer to limiting violence in schools. There are three overlapping educational initiatives that together could be instrumental in creating respectful, caring, and safe schools. They are:

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- Building a caring community within a school where children evidence belonging,
- Implementing a multifaceted character education program, and
- Teaching conflict resolution strategies.

Early reports from an extensive evaluation of thirteen leading violence prevention efforts state that "preventing school violence involves comprehensive programs that forge close, trusting relationships and help young people develop a host of healthy behaviors including conflict resolution and anger management skills" (Halford, 1998). Together the three overlapping educational initiatives above can create such comprehensive, preventive programs.

Caring Community / Belonging

Work by Battistich, Solomon, Watson and Schaps (1994), Goodenow (1993a, 1993b), Bryk and Driscoll (1988), Battistich and Solomon (1995), among others, has provided considerable evidence that the sense of belonging or sense of community in schools and classrooms characterized by caring, respect, involvement and the perception that each person makes significant and valued contributions, is positively correlated with several student outcomes. Sense of community for students has been measured using items representing two elements of community: (a) students' perceptions that they and their classmates cared about and were supportive of one another; and (b) that they had an active and important role in classroom norm setting and decision making (Battistich et al., 1994). Goodenow (1993b) measured belonging using items involving perceived liking by other students and teachers, personal acceptance and inclusion, respect and encouragement for participation, and a sense of being a part of the school in general.

Sense of community has been associated with student trust in and respect for teachers, better academic performance, and more positive social attitudes and prosocial behavior (Battistich et al., 1994), as well as conflict resolution skills, empathy, and self-esteem (Solomon, Watson, Schaps, Battistich, & Solomon, 1990). Belonging is significantly correlated with academic grades, valuing of schoolwork, and school achievement and negatively correlated with absences and tardiness (Goodenow, 1993a, 1993b). And Maslow (1970) in his discussion of a hierarchy of human needs, pointed out that belonging was a prerequisite human need that had to be satisfied before one could achieve sense of self-worth.

Teacher practices of showing warmth and supportiveness, promoting cooperation, eliciting student thinking and discussion, emphasizing prosocial values, and limiting the use of extrinsic control were all significantly related to positive behavior among students, student active participation in learning (on task behavior), and student influence defined as students being provided choices of activities and participating in planning. These student behaviors were in turn significantly associated with sense of community, including among other factors, liking of school, enjoyment of class, learning motivation, and altruistic behavior.

Goodenow's work (1993b) suggests that student sense of belonging can be influenced by interventions at the student, classroom, and school levels. At the student level, individuals can be trained in social skills so others will not alienate them, and individual students can be targeted for increased supportive contact. This second recommendation comes from findings that teacher support explained over one-third of students' assessment of the interest, importance, and value of the academic work of a class (Goodenow, 1993a). At the school and classroom level, she suggests cooperative learning tasks, smaller interdisciplinary teaching teams, peer tutoring, and school projects involving the participation of many students working together (Goodenow, 1993b).

All these teacher behaviors, which together help create a caring, respectful, democratic classroom, can result in students being integral parts of a caring community where trusting, close relationships exist. Teachers must model what they want their students to emulate. Teachers must provide and encourage interpersonal support and cooperation, and must emphasize and encourage student autonomy and self-direction (Kim, Solomon, & Roberts, 1995) if the social as well as academic benefits of belonging, of feeling a sense of community, are to be realized by students and schools.

Character Education

The goals of character education programs are to develop basic ethical values such as fairness, respect, responsibility, caring, and citizenship in students. The underlying premises of such programs include: good character is not formed automatically, but developed over time through teaching, example, and practice; and effective K-12 character education helps make schools more caring communities, reduces negative student behavior, and prepares students to be responsible citizens (Character Education Partnership, 1996).

There is substantial support for teaching ethical values in schools. A recent Gallup poll showed 84% of parents with school-age children wanted public schools to provide instruction concerning moral behavior (Geiger, 1994). In addition, more and more people believe universal moral values do exist. Rushworth Kidder of the Institute for Global Ethics interviewed "moral exemplars" around the world. The moral values they held in common were truth, unity (loyalty), compassion (love, caring), justice (fairness), respect for life, tolerance, responsibility, and freedom (Kidder, 1994). Community groups regularly create a similar list to those Kidder found (P. Born, personal communication, July 24, 1998). The question "whose values will be taught?" will not be asked if parents and community reach consensus about the moral values to be taught in local schools.

Research is beginning to show that a comprehensive character education program is effective in promoting ethical values and decreasing negative behavior (Elliot, 1993). Teacher and school practices common to effective programs include:

- involving democratic processes in the development of class norms,
- fostering mutual respect and teaching good listening skills and civil discourse,
- building in parent and community support,
- using cooperative learning and teaching the social skills necessary to learn cooperatively,
- discussion of moral dilemmas,
- incorporating role modeling,
- encompassing the entire school (cafeteria, school buses, etc.) in the program, and,
- incorporating service learning, linking students to needs in the community (Lemming, 1993).

The teacher practices of showing warmth, promoting cooperation, eliciting student thinking, and emphasizing prosocial values cited earlier as precursors to building a caring community also help build student character. DeVries and Zan (1994) state that children construct their moral understanding from their day-to-day social interactions. If children receive warmth and supportiveness from teachers, are encouraged to cooperate and act prosocially, those behaviors become part of their experience that in turn encourages them to model the behaviors. Damon (1985) has found that children, when given responsibility and a say in classroom activities, are more likely to behave in a caring, moral manner. Also, adult modeling of altruism, adult explaining positive effects of altruistic behavior, and direct instruction as to how to behave in a prosocial manner (Eisenberg, 1992) promote ethical behavior.

Since children learn in a variety of ways any program designed to teach ethical values and to enhance moral development must engage students in many ways. Educators should consider engaging students' ethical reasoning (the head) and feelings of care and empathy (the heart) and teaching and modeling prosocial conduct (the habit) (Perry, 1996).

In a school where students are respected and valued, where a sense of community (of belonging) exists, the teaching and modeling of ethical values fits easily and enhances the school community.

Conflict Resolution

Even in an atmosphere of respect where ethical values are taught and practiced, conflicts will arise. Conflict may be defined as a state of incompatible behaviors (Johnson, 1970). Typically school conflicts are conflicts of interest where the actions of one person to reach his or her goal prevents or blocks or interferes with the actions of another person attempting to reach his or her goal (Deutsch, 1973, as cited in Johnson & Johnson, 1996). When conflicts are not settled in a mutually agreed upon manner, they may escalate to dominance and/or aggression. Often conflicts, which are a natural part of life and may well by necessary for growth and development, are not resolved or not resolved in constructive ways (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). Then, they can fester and escalate. Frequently resolving a conflict is viewed as "gains for one can only be at the expense of the other," which is called a distributive approach solution. However a more constructive way to resolve conflicts is the integrative approach where the goal is to maximize the gains of both in conflict.

The ability to resolve conflicts constructively tends to increase psychological health, self-esteem, self-regulation, and resilience. Students can learn to resolve conflicts constructively. "The existing research indicates that untrained students of all ages rely on withdrawal and suppression of conflicts or use aggression for coercive purposes. Untrained students almost never use integrative negotiation procedures or strive to solve the problem on which a conflict is based" (DeCecco & Richards, 1974). After constructive (integrative) training in conflict resolution and peer mediation more than 25% of conflicts were resolved through integrative agreements, and more than 20% were resolved by creating new agreements (Johnson, Johnson, Dudley, Ward & Magnuson, 1995). Other students note that peers after training were more likely to resolve their conflicts by "talking it out" and teachers noticed changes in their students' spontaneous use of conflict resolution skills (Johnson & Johnson, 1996).

Although there are numerous conflict resolution programs, many are not based on theories of conflict. When conflict is looked upon as natural, both positive and negative, and the resolution skills that are taught are constructive, students are able to successfully mediate schoolmates' conflicts regardless of age or socio-economic status. In addition, students trained in conflict resolution skills can transfer these skills to other school and non-school situations. Training is crucial and may need to be regularly repeated, ever increasing the complexity of learning as students mature (Johnson & Johnson, 1996).

Conclusion

The mission of schools must be expanded to address young people's social, emotional, and moral lives. To prevent violence in schools we must help our children be responsible, respected and respectful, tolerant of differences, and able to resolve conflicts in a peaceful manner.

The American Psychological Association's (APA) Commission on Violence and Youth states:

> We overwhelmingly conclude, on the basis of a body of psychological research on violence, that violence is not a random, uncontrollable or inevitable occurrence... Although we acknowledge that the problem of violence involving youth is staggering...there is overwhelming evidence that we can intervene effectively in the lives of young people to reduce and prevent their involvement in violence (A.P.A., 1993 cited in Lantieri & Patti, 1996, p.14).

Metal detectors and surveillance cameras are only marginally helpful in most settings (Halford, 1998). Building community where students are appreciated and belong, and teaching and modeling ethical values, allow students to contribute in a positive manner within a trusting, caring setting. Equipping students with conflict resolution skills within a respectful, caring school community will allow our students to use the social/civic/ethical skills necessary for their success and safety. Every student in school needs a positive, caring relationship accompanied by the knowledge and skills to be responsible, caring, and ethical and to resolve conflicts in a constructive manner. If we can work together to create such school environments and teach such skills and knowledge, then we will be on our way to a long-term solution to violence in the schools. The resources are available. The programs can be infused into the regular academic subjects and activities of the schools. Schools and communities need to look at what works and begin.

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Community-Based Education

Christine J. Villani and Douglas Atkins

Howard Gardner (1991) states, "the modern secular school is encountered all over the world. In such a school the religious, moral, and political message that dominated (and also sustained) earlier schooling have receded in importance," (pg. 131). Education should not be seen as a "quick fix", a simple panacea, for producing a fully-developed, ready learner who is capable of facing today's insurmountable problems and situations. Parents, administrators, politicians, business leaders, and all of those adults who have a stake in children's education must change their current paradigm; traditional methods of education are no longer satisfactory. Adults need to view education as a process for creating life-long learners. We must all stop expecting children to fit old models, and allow for the natural emergence of future citizens that embody creative spirit, critical thinking, and high standards. Creative spirit encompasses the internal drive, motivation, and external influences whereby our students try new things and develop different ways of viewing the world around them. Critical thinking by our students involves the student's ability to analyze strengths and weakness and give possible remedies for improvement. High standards refer to the idea of fostering excellence for all and living with integrity. We must work toward building community relationships that facilitate such development.

Today's society needs to embrace the ideal of attaining and maintaining community-based relationships. Simple values like caring about the quality of life and striving for unconditional love of the human race must be manifested. Community cohesiveness is a natural human goal for which we should all strive. To do this, local communities must embrace their schools, schools in which students learn and grow into productive citizens. Community-based education fosters interdependence and leads toward educational and community practices that have the potential to impact people on a global scale.

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Community-Based Education

Community-based education goes beyond cognitive capacities and encompasses the social and emotional aspects of learning. The relationships that children create with caring adults are the overarching premise of community-based education. James Comer asserts that the emotional and social development of students comes from the collaborative efforts of parents, schools, and communities (as cited in O'Neil, 1997).

The learning process of community-based education goes beyond the cognitive capacity of instruction in the "three R's." It expands the definition of "intelligence" to include the learner's ability to gain understanding, use knowledge, and solve problems, while developing a sense of self. Success is not based solely on learning core academic subjects, but couples academics with creativity and personal willpower through an emphasis on interpersonal relationships and intrapersonal development.

Community-based education is centered on the student's ability to recognize and support the needs of the surrounding community. In this way, students become accountable for providing values which stem from their freedom to express, develop, and solve the inherent problems or concerns they have for their community. Over the long-term use of this ideal model, the entire community will become involved in the process, thereby making the educational process cyclical and continuously propelled. Reciprocal relationships based on these ideals will be promoted and fostered by all. Students and teachers are the fuel that generate community-based education. Parents, community leaders, administrators, school board members, and citizens are an integral part in the development, production, implementation, and assessment of community-based education. This cohesive interplay is designed to foster trust and belief in fellow human beings. It also creates collaborative efforts between school and community to solve various problems.

Unlike Gardner's (1991) belief regarding the emergence of community involvement, our view of community-based education focuses on the student's pursuit toward the betterment of his or her surrounding community. Gardner contends, "if we wish to have education of higher quality and more rigorous standards...then, as a nation, we must decide that we desire to have high quality education and that we are willing to work for it" (p. 258). However, it is the authors' belief that through students' efforts, community-based problem solving can emerge and promote learning modalities beyond Gardner's definition. Students will seek, sort through, discuss, dialogue, prioritize, and solve community problems as an educational pursuit. They will simultaneously experience personal growth in academic areas. Furthermore, continued involvement within the student's locus of control will provide elevated levels of educational synthesis beyond prepackaged curricula.

A student's learning should not be contingent upon a set of stagnant standards. In community-based education assessment is the result of emphasis placed on creative and innovative measures as indicated by the learner. Learning modalities and the student's needs for intrinsic motivation are taken into account as a further result by basing the venue of learning upon the student's desires. Community-based education is grounded within the essence of equality as witnessed in democratic society. The emphasis is taken off assessment and instructional strategies that are standardized; it is placed instead on high quality performance and the creation of life-long learners. For example, imagine an eighth grade class working with teachers from various subject areas to solve the problem of homelessness in their surrounding community. After research and discussion, the students go into the community to enlist the involvement and support of community members who can affect real changes regarding this serious issue. The teachers become responsible for developing integrated lessons within their subject areas. These lessons, originally conceived from the knowledge base provided by the students, will become necessary and beneficial learning tools required by the student to fully understand every aspect of the homelessness issue as well as reasonable solutions.

The key to achieving these goals is the student's ability to accomplish a high level of quality in their work. If everyone is focused on establishing this, the educational process occurs effectively. However, establishing the necessary cognitive level is often contingent upon self-esteem. A student who is given the opportunity to establish and maintain self-esteem may become more attentive to his or her learning environment. Fostering students' growth by implementing tasks requiring critical thinking skills, long-term planning, and group efforts enhances students' self-esteem. Students' self-esteem is of paramount importance if teachers are to provide quality education. Additionally, a teacher's self-esteem needs to be bolstered by the school community. In promoting the teachers' self-esteem, the teacher brings his or her own sense of self into the classroom. This creates a circular process from teacher to student and student to teacher so that healthy self-esteem is continually promoted. Improved self-esteem occurs when worthwhile opportunities are provided for and internalized by all.

An appreciation for community stems from a person's desire to seek out and to value the company of others. Children need to have meaningful relationships with adults who are important to them; they must connect with the community in which they live. According to Apple and Bean (1985), the establishment of parental involvement, an emphasis on community, a child-centered curriculum, and parent-centered decision-making will be a necessary construct for the schools of tomorrow. Unequivocally, the global sense of community has been tattered and broken for the past several decades.

Furthermore, this breakdown affects students and student learning. The way to restore the relationship that needs to exist between learners and their community is to provide bonding opportunities through the educational process. Giving students the ability to solve actual problems within their community is a fundamental approach for establishing vital bonds. Problem solving, coupled with traditional instruction, will lead to high levels of student achievement and self-esteem. The development of the whole child will be facilitated through the restoration of communities and community-based education.

A concrete example of community-based education is provided by the authors' use of this construct in an eighth grade speech class. The unit was designed with the end in mind. This particular community-based project promoted the study of group dynamics. Eighth grade students were told they would eventually give a culminating presentation to discuss their honest and candid feelings about a group experience. The basis for creating groups stemmed from a purposefully ambiguous directive given by the teacher. Students were told they must create a group among their classmates and carry out an event or project designed solely for the purpose of helping others. Unbeknownst to the students, the design of the group was carefully predetermined by the teacher. Students were given three colors. Each color represented either race, gender, or predetermined high and low achievement levels. After considering equal distribution of all factors, the teacher created a set color code pattern that equalized these three factors. The entire class was told that they must choose their groups based on acquiring the exact combination. As a result, cliques, friendships, racial polarization, and gender allegiance were eliminated.

Setting the groups took a total of four to six class periods. Many arguments ensued about the predetermined color codes. Animosity and frustration were directed to the teacher as the students struggled to finalize their groups. The teacher never suggested appointing leaders or creating a process for selecting individuals. As a result, students were forced to deal with varying personalities and characteristics. When the groups were finally in place, they were given a calendar and specific parameters for carrying out their mission for helping others. Considerations for telephone logs, field trips, permission slips, parent involvement, financial needs, social needs, and the like were discussed in a letter that was signed by each student and their parent(s).

The results were astounding. The community service projects resulted in city landscaping, visiting children at a nearby hospital, visiting nursing homes, arranging dinner dates with nursing home residents, raising funds for charitable organizations, and cleaning up the community. Some groups were not as successful in gaining widespread attention for the charitable deeds. However, each group did complete the mission. Areas of learning covered during the project included math, social science, physical education and health, science, history, literature, language arts, fine arts, and speech communications.

The student speeches covered a very wide range of feelings and learning experiences. One parameter set for the speeches was that no student could name another student, and if the anonymity of a student was jeopardized, the speaker's assessment score would be lowered. Typical with any group dynamic, students told of extreme frustrations with members who did not live up to the expectations set by the group. At the other extreme, some students were moved to tears when discussing the joy they felt when helping others, especially those visiting nursing homes and terminally ill children. Cedric Higgins, a well-respected and well-liked young man, hit the mark when giving his speech:

> You see, our class was like a can of mixed nuts. We were all different in almost every area. Making everybody happy, I think, just wasn't going to happen. That is one of the two lessons that I learned. You can't please everybody. No matter what, someone is always going to have a different opinion or feel "left out" and neglected. Now, the most important thing that I learned during this whole experience was that no matter where you go or what you do, you're always going to have to interact with people—people that you may like—then, of course, people that you may not like. No matter what, you're going to have to communicate with them. Now, I think if we would have put race, popularity, and intelligence aside from the start, then we probably could have accomplished much more. Not getting it right the first time was good. Like I said, we learned a valuable lesson, but we caught it by surprise.

Creating a community-based education may seem difficult and far-fetched, but it can be accomplished with outstanding results. We have not lost the capacity to envision and meet the needs of children; we have only suppressed it through misunderstanding the learner of today. We can no longer look at children just as our future. They must become our present. In the words of Albert Einstein, "no problem can be solved from the same consciousness that created it..." (as cited in Wheatley, 1994).

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Improving Parent Involvement Programs and Practice: A Qualitative Study of Parent Perceptions

Amy J. L. Baker

Recent major legislation — The Goals 2000: Educate America Act and the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) — has made parent involvement in their children's education a national priority. School districts nationwide are being encouraged to reexamine their parent involvement policies and programs and to demonstrate innovative initiatives in order to obtain federal education dollars. Eligibility for Title I money is now contingent upon the development of school-family compacts in which families and schools declare their mutual responsibility for children's learning. To receive ESEA money, at least 1% must be earmarked for parent involvement programs. Partnerships are to be forged between homes, schools, and communities with an unparalleled level of contact and communication between parents and educators (e.g., United States Department of Education, 1994). The challenge now is for parents, educators, employers, policy makers, and community leaders to make these partnerships work.

While most agree that parent involvement is a requisite for children's school success (e.g., Epstein, 1985, 1995; Henderson & Berla, 1984), there is little consensus about what constitutes effective parent involvement. No one paradigm has emerged to dominate research and practice. Thus, confusion persists concerning the activities, goals, and desired outcomes of various parent involvement programs and practices. Moreover, parents have had surprisingly few opportunities to share their unique and valuable perspectives on what parent involvement means to them and

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what they need to make school-home partnerships work (however, see Kiley, 1995).

To address this issue, twelve Sections of the National Council of Jewish Women conducted focus groups with parents to hear from the "voices from the field" about parent involvement[1]. The goal of this study was to build on and extend the growing foundation of theory and practice concerning strengthening school-home collaborative partnerships (e.g., Davies, 1994; Epstein, 1995; Moles, 1993a; 1993b). These focus groups were one of four activities of *Parents As School Partners*, NCJW's volunteer research and action initiative exploring parent involvement to promote their children's school success.[2]

Method

Focus groups was selected as the appropriate methodology to generate in-depth and rich information about the perceptions and experiences of parents. As the goal was to highlight as many different issues, opinions, and perspectives as possible rather than testing specific research hypotheses, making decisions, reaching consensus, or generating quantitative data, focus groups were perceived as the best fit between available methodological choices and project goals (Morgan & Kreuger, 1993).

Twelve NCJW Sections conducted parent focus groups. These Sections were diverse in size of membership and geography. NCJW volunteers received training through individual consultation, site visits, an in-depth how-to guide, a project newsletter, and ongoing intensive individualized technical assistance.

Sixteen focus groups were conducted. Parent participants were invited through random selection procedures. Response rates varied from 4% to 75%, averaging 15%. Each focus group was audio-taped and followed a similar format, including an introduction; signing of consent forms; opening, main, and summary questions; payment of subjects ($20.00); and completion of a background information form. Questions addressed types of contact parents have with schools, the conditions under which certain types of contact occur, their beliefs about parent involvement, and their perceptions of the schools interest in and attitudes towards their involvement.

Sample

One hundred and eleven parents participated. Fifty-three (47.7%) were Caucasian, 46 (41.4%) were African-American, and 12 (10.8%) were from another minority, mostly Hispanic. Half of the parents had no more than a high school education while the other half had education beyond high school. Nearly half of the parents (47.7%) were unemployed (either not working outside the home, volunteering outside the home, taking courses, or looking for work). Forty-five parents were employed full-time outside the home and the remaining thirteen parents (11.7%) were employed part-time. Seventy-two (65%) were married or in some other coupled relationship while thirty-nine (35%) were in single-parent families. One fifth (21.8%) claimed government assistance as their family's primary source of income and the remaining seventy-eight percent reported job wages.

Results and Discussion

The audio tapes of the sixteen parent focus groups were transcribed verbatim, totaling over 500 pages of transcriptions. The transcripts were read and submitted to a content analysis in which each unit (idea, sentence, paragraph) was grouped together with similar thoughts and ideas. The groups of ideas were then classified according to topic. This process resulted in the development of six categories, each with several subcategories.

These categories were partly based on the questions posed in the focus groups and partly based on other topics raised by the parents over the course of the focus group discussions. The focus group questions served as a starting place for the dialogue and were not strictly research questions.

How are Parents Involved?

Parents were involved in the schools in several different ways and levels, with some parents having little or no involvement and other parents being highly involved.[3] No parent was involved in every way and most parents reported a range of involvement experiences:

> I work in the classroom. My first grader, I go in every other week, one day. My third grader, I go in every Friday. I work in the library at Johnson two days a week and here one day a week. I cover in the office when they need somebody.

Being physically present at the school as a classroom volunteer, as a room mother, going on field trips, or assisting in the office and other areas of the schools, was a common type of involvement mentioned by these parents. Parents varied in the extent to which they wanted to be in their own child's classroom:

> I prefer not to honestly work with the children directly when I can help it. I don't mind photocopying and I kind of avoid class mother and field trips.[4]

Another mother responded by saying:

> I volunteer when I can and I like the class trips. And I've been in the class to read them stories and anything else that they will allow me to do with a three-year-old behind me, is what I've been able to do.

The parents who volunteered in the class or in the building did so because they believed it was beneficial for the school and the children. They perceived that they were helping the teacher do her job better which ultimately benefited their child.

Parents also had contact and involvement in the school by attending parenting programs and activities at the school. Unlike volunteering in the classroom – which parents reported doing to help the school and their child – parents attended such programs to further their own skills and development. This type of involvement was mentioned least often.

In a few focus groups parents reported being actively involved in the PTA, listing many ways in which they were involved at the school, because of the PTA. Fixing up libraries, running food drives for poor families, planning and funding school trips, arranging for the school to obtain computers, planning teacher appreciation activities, funding prevention programs, and arranging for talent shows were just some of the PTA sponsored activities mentioned. Most of these activities were designed to enhance the quality of life at the school for the administration, teachers, parents, and children. These parents saw themselves as performing an important service to the school. It appeared as if parent/teacher associations and organizations were an important avenue for parents to become involved in the school. But, the PTA was not for everyone. Typical complaints among some parents who did not participate were that they felt as if they did not belong, that the PTA was a closed group or club in which new members were not welcomed. Difficulty attending evening meetings for parents with young children was another barrier to fuller involvement in the PTA. Among those who were involved in the PTA, there was frustration that a handful of people did all the work and a wish for more help and involvement from other parents. Clearly, there could be more communication among the PTA and parents not involved in it about how to make it a more inclusive experience. For those already involved, the PTA was one way to maintain involvement inside the school. Those who were involved seemed to stay involved over a several year period and seemed to take on roles of increasing responsibility.

Another form of contact with the schools mentioned by the focus group participants was parent-teacher communications (meetings, conferences, phone calls). These meetings took three primary forms, (1) specially arranged meetings to discuss a particular problem, (2) ongoing parent-teacher communication regarding a child's progress, and (3) regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences. These contacts were discussed by the parents:

> I have two daughters. The oldest is in sixth grade. She stays in the behavior classroom for most of the day. My contact with the school on her is big. Very big. We have daily notes that come home in regards to homework and behavior. I have at least one phone call a week from the teacher or to the teacher in regards to problems, existing problems or new problems or old problems.

Other parents tried to maintain some form of ongoing contact in the absence of problems:

> I periodically will call them or they will call me because I'm a very active mother and we need to communicate. I think my first [job] is to make sure that all teachers know I want them to communicate with me. . . so we have letters back and forth and phone calls.

Not all parents had such communication with the schools and some did not even attend regularly scheduled meetings. One parent, when asked if she attended any parent meetings, responded, "Not for me...They have 'em but I don't go."

One activity that seemed to bring many of the parents to the school were programs in which their own children performed. Plays, programs, band practice, and musical performances were activities that several parents mentioned as "must sees". Even those parents who did not attend PTA meetings or volunteer in the classroom made a special effort to be an audience member for their child's performances. Their child's excitement over these events and clear desire to have their parents in the audience was the added incentive parents needed to make the effort to come to the school. Social events geared for parents or the whole family such as open houses and pot luck dinners were also popular among some of the parents. They were seen as low key events in which they were not pressured to attend and which were purely social gatherings. Parents appreciated these opportunities to gather and socialize with other families in the school. The relatively low cost involved was an added incentive especially for parents with limited budgets. Several parents noted that the meals were "bargains" and "good deals". Again, transportation, having young children at home, being a single parent, and lack of time were barriers to fuller participation.

Unlike the school events, only a few parents mentioned participating in school committees such as curriculum reviews, staff evaluations, or school improvement. As one parent explained,

> There's a budgetary advisory committee at every school that has parents on it. And we have a site based budget which just means that the money is given to the school. The committee decides do we want to get a computer for the media center or do we want to get this new English curriculum for first grade? They are in on that decision. . . . That's parent involvement to me. . . the day-to-day decisions that are going to affect your children.

Parents expressed interest in hearing more about these decision-making roles once it was brought up in the focus group. Some parents apparently had never heard of this option for involvement and were eager to learn more while others had known about the committees but did not know how to take the first step to become involved in them. (These findings are consistent with those reported by Blakely and Stearns (1986) and Chavkin and Williams (1993) that few parents serve in decision-making roles in school programs.)

Overseeing homework was also a popular topic of conversation among the mothers as there was considerable variation in how parents dealt with their children's homework (see Dauber & Epstein, 1993, for similar findings). Parents differed in the extent to which they structured their children's completion of homework with some being an active and involved "homework manager" while other parents allowed their children to decide for themselves if and when to do their homework. Some parents sat down with their children every day to jointly complete homework. These parents informed their children of incorrect answers and acted as a coach or "teacher at home". Other parents felt that their children needed to learn responsibility for themselves and that their children could do homework on their own. Most parents seemed to have an opinion on this issue and many felt insecure about whether theirs was the best approach. They worried that their input and assistance might be impeding their child's learning process. They did not know whether to give their children the right answers or to let them figure it out for themselves. They were unclear as to whether the purpose of homework was for the teacher to see if the child understood the work or for the child to perform well. In some cases parents felt that they should not have to work with their children if the teacher was doing her job properly. They interpreted working with their child at home as a sign that the teacher was abdicating her teaching responsibility. These were issues and questions with which these parents struggled and to which they did not have the answers. No parent mentioned discussing this issue with her child's teacher nor that the school provided clear feedback and guidance as to the parent's role in the child's homework. Clearly, parents could benefit from more specific guidance from schools as to what is expected of them.[5]

A final form of contact with the school occurred in instances when the parent became involved in order to advocate on behalf of her child. For example, a parent with a physically handicapped child became involved in order to change the attitudes of the other children in the classroom:

> My son had problems when he first came because the children knew that he was different so they kind of picked on him. . . . But I came immediately and let the teacher know what was going on with the children and I as his parent would not tolerate anything that interferes with his education.

Another parent became involved when she saw her son's grades dropping for no apparent reason:

> My son last quarter dropped a grade almost in every class . . . I called up and requested a conference. Most of the teachers were like, "Well he is an honor roll student what are you here for?" And I said, "I think there is a problem. Every class something has happened so I don't want to miss something before it gets any further." And that is all it took. When he saw that I was there. . .that's all it took for him to straighten it right out. The grades went right back up. I think that just a little bit of communication between the teachers and I that straightened it right up.

A third parent told how she stepped in when she felt her son's teacher was making a mistake in her teaching strategy:

> As a parent we have to step in. We have to talk to the teacher. . . I gave him a five minute math test and he was on problem nine and I said that he only has five minutes, move on. He said, "I can't move on. My teacher said not to

> skip." So I went up there and said maybe that's the problem. Maybe he didn't understand. And I talked to the teacher and she said, "Oh yes I don't have time to be grading his paper." I said, "You gave these kids 50 problems and five minutes to do it and you tell them don't skip if they don't know it?" "Well I don't have time to be checking all this work." I said, "Well don't time them. A timed test is to see how many you can do within a time period." I can see if you don't communicate with the teacher I wouldn't have known that.

Another parent shared her struggle to obtain appropriate services for her handicapped child:

> I had to quote chapter and verse from the law and read it out and literally have the piece of legislation there because more than one time I contacted my legislator and said, "Can you send me a copy from the state?" And more than once I pulled it out in the meeting and said what the law reads.

In such instances, these parents felt that if they did not speak up for their child no one would. They felt it was their job as a parent to be their child's advocate within the school system. This was especially true when children were younger and were less able to speak up for themselves. It was also clear that parents were more likely to advocate for their children when they felt a wrong had been done to them. When they saw their child hurt by a teacher or not learning to their capacity because of something that was happening within the schools, parents rallied their efforts and took the school on. They believed that there was no one else to do this for them. If they did not take on the school the problem would go unaddressed. According to the parents, the teacher's role is to help all the children and no one speaks on behalf of their particular child but they as the parent. While most parents felt the school was responsible for teaching their child and that they did not have expertise in that arena, they did feel that as the parent they have a right and an obligation to question the school on behalf of their child.

Why do Parents Become Involved?

Parents shared their beliefs about the importance and value of being involved at the school and in their child's education in general. These beliefs were stated directly as well as implied in the stories they told about specific instances in which they became involved and the statements they made about how and why they were involved.

As discussed above, some parents become involved in order to address a problem between the school and their child. In these instances involvement was seen as a means to solving a problem rather than as an end in itself. One reason that parents felt so strongly that they could advocate for their children even though they were not educational professionals was that they felt that they were experts on their children. They knew their children better than anyone else and had knowledge about their children that no one else had.

Parents felt that this "insider knowledge" of their children could be of use to the teachers, not just when there was a conflict but on an ongoing basis. Parents were frustrated that there was no formal mechanism for the teachers to obtain information from the parents about their child's learning styles, interests, and talents. As one parent of a special needs child noted:

> I think every special ed teacher should sit down with the mother and get the history of the child and strengths and weaknesses. The parent has the very knowledge the teacher needs. . . that when shared with those teachers, can make their job easier and give the children a better chance at success.

Many parents became involved and saw the value of their involvement as an ongoing collaboration between themselves and the school on behalf of their child:

> The more we put into our school, the more the children get out of it. The better off we make it for the teachers, the happier they are. And the more they enjoy working with our children. . . And you want the teacher to feel appreciated because if it's a good teacher you want them to stay.

They perceived their involvement as making an important contribution to the school and thereby indirectly improving the quality of education their children would receive. Anything they could do to help the school would allow the teachers to spend more time teaching. These parents saw their jobs as freeing up the teacher by doing the tasks that took the teacher's attention away from the children. Therefore, photocopying, errands to the office, taking lunch orders, and such were seen as important and worthy activities for a parent volunteer. For parents who did not see themselves as having a talent or interest in working directly with the children in the classroom, there were ways to be involved which could make a contribution to their child's education. Parents recognized that schools have a limited budget and one way to channel more resources into the schools was through the effort and person power of the parents.

Some parents were involved in order to show their children that the family values education and views the school as an important part of the child's life, "I want to show the kids that it's important, that school's very important to me. That's why I want to be visible here and show them that it is just a really important place for them."

In addition to seeing the benefits of their involvement at the school, some parents also felt it was important to be involved at home, seeing themselves as an equal partner in teaching the child outside of school. As one parent commented:

> It's like half and half. We have to work together as a team as far as reading and school activities and things like that. So I guess it's like when they leave one school it's like coming home to another school.

Many parents recognized the potential influence they could have on their child's education and learning, exemplified in the following two comments:

> Of course the teachers can't speak and be with every child at school because there is not enough time. In my opinion parents have to spend as much [time] as they can with children and help them because they begin from the family not from the school.

> It's all in what you teach them at home because they only have your children. . . six hours a day. You have them the rest, weekends and everything.

What are the Barriers to Parent Involvement?

Parents were aware that they were not as involved as they could be or thought they should be. They talked wistfully about wanting to be more involved and feeling disappointed about the school events and field trips that they did not attend. Some also clearly felt guilty that they were not doing as much as other parents.

One set of barriers to parent involvement in the schools related to logistical constraints of time[6], money, scheduling, transportation, and child care. Having younger children at home or working outside the home during the day made it difficult for some parents to volunteer in the school or to attend PTA meetings. While some parent teacher organizations offered child care during monthly meetings, none offered transportation. Several parents commented that while they were allowed to bring their children to the PTA meeting they did not feel comfortable doing so unless a separate space was provided for the children to play. Single parents or parents in a family where both parents work faced a challenge for attending school events let alone trying to be at the school on a regular basis for volunteering or participating in the PTA. Many of these women had unpredictable schedules of rotating shift work as well as husbands with unpredictable work schedules: "I can't make it here hardly, because of work". One parent offered an interesting perspective in that she felt she needed to be home with her son in the evenings to help him with his homework. She chose to stay home with him rather than attend PTA meetings. Some parents' lives were so full with work and children, maintaining the house and going to school that involvement in their child's school sometimes took a back seat:

> My problem is that usually I'm still so bombarded with paperwork that I forget to check with them and then I notice things after they happen. . . .One of my goals after I graduate next year. . . well one thing I've done is stop going to night school because I'm trying to work and go to school at the same time. . .so I can be there for him at night because that was really driving me crazy. . . so my goal next year, once I've graduated from school, I'm going to give more time to my children and get involved more with the school because they do have a lot of good things going on.

Another parent shared her difficulty:

> I work a rotating shift. I work two jobs and to come to festivals and stuff, I have to request time off and then cover it with vacation. But I can't do that every time there's a meeting. I'm usually here and having to cover my job some other way when one of my kids is in trouble here, or sick. And so it is almost like I put that on the back burner. If one of my kids is performing or doing something in the festivals then I can make time for it.

Another logistical consideration a few parents mentioned was the lack of money to participate in some of the activities offered by the school.

Book fairs, social events, bake sales, picture day all required a financial contribution from the family. Anger was expressed by some of the parents who felt that these events should not require additional money on the part of the parents, as not all parents could afford to participate.

A second common barrier to greater parent involvement was the relationship between parents and the schools (see Mannan & Blackwell, 1992, for similar results). Some parents had negative experiences being involved and felt that it would be better for their child if they stayed away. Other parents complained that they would like to be more involved but felt that the schools did not really want them to be, despite their claims to the contrary. As one parent explained:

> As parents if you come to the teacher because you are concerned or you have a question or something, the initial reaction to you is that you are interfering. . . that I'm stepping on their toes and I should just mind my own business.

Another parent stated that as long as she was invited to come to the school she was welcomed and warmly received but if she came on her own initiative because of a problem or something she wanted to discuss then she did not feel welcome. Several parents complained that the school did not want to hear what they had to say about their child, the curriculum, or anything else. "They say they want to see parent involvement but a lot of times it's sort of like on their terms." Another parent complained, "You can come and cook the spaghetti for the spaghetti dinner. You can come and work in the clinic. But as far as sitting on a committee and being heard about curricular issues, it doesn't have that impact." Some parents even felt that the teachers did not welcome them into the classroom, "It's ok if you show up on a field trip but once you want to volunteer in a classroom some teachers have a problem with that and I don't understand why." Another parent stated that, "The teachers seem afraid of the parents."

Another common complaint that discouraged involvement was that the school always backed up the teacher in a dispute or complaint and did not give a fair hearing to the student or the parent. There was a sense of a closed system or united front in which the teacher and the principal did not want to hear anything negative about one of their own. "[If] something happens and you go meet with the assistant principal or principal, they are always going to take the side of the teacher." More than one parent told of conflicts with a teacher in which they felt that the teacher was either not doing her job well or was being rude or cruel to their child. In most cases the parent did not report feeling satisfied by attempts to address the issue. In some cases they felt that there had been negative repercussions from their attempts to advocate on behalf of their child. For example, one parent who was involved in an effort to have a teacher removed reported that her name was “mud” after that experience and that teachers made her son feel badly for having the mother who had gotten the teacher fired. After that experience she stayed away from the school in order not to make more trouble for her son. While this was an extreme example of a lack of positive outcome due to parent involvement, parents in general agreed that the school did not want them involved in school decision-making such as evaluations of teachers, input in curriculum, or allocation of resources. Parents felt that the school wanted their involvement in so far as it was convenient and helpful for the school such as giving money to fund raising events and helping out on field trips. They did not feel that the school was responsive to their ideas about what involvement meant to them.

Another barrier parents discussed was one than emanated from their children and manifested itself in two ways. First, most parents reported that students lost information sent home from the school to the parent. Children were not perceived as adequate carriers of important documents between administration and home. As one parent sadly noted, “The communication tends to break down as the kids get older.” Another parent agreed that kids, “. . . do not bring those notices home. They throw ‘em out, they leave ‘em in their locker, they crush ‘em in their book bag.” Another parent added, “And the kids don’t give ‘em to us. So something has went on and we don’t know about it until it’s over. And then the school thinks that we don’t care. . .and then we think that they’re not sending us notices, so it’s a lack of communication back and forth.”

Second, and possibly related to the above problem, was that many parents felt that their children—especially as they moved from elementary to middle and high school—did not want them involved in their school life. Parents felt that their children would be embarrassed to have them at school or on school trips. Quotes of such instances were abundant, "My son has kind of requested that if I’m going to help that I not do it on his team. So that’s one rule we have." A second parent put it this way, "I have one daughter here in the 7th grade and I have the same problem. When she was in grade school, I was active but here she only wants me to bake her some goodies for the bake sale. Other than that, 'Oh Mommy stay in the background.'" Other parents added that not only do their children not want them at the school but they did not want parental input into their school related conflicts or their homework:

> I found that as my son got into sixth grade, that he didn’t really want me checking his homework any more. It seems when they get older they say, “I don’t need your help anymore.”

One mother told how her daughter had chosen to handle conflicts with teachers on her own rather than have her intervene, noting a shift in the amount and ways in which her child wanted her to be involved.

A final barrier mentioned by parents related to lack of information regarding school events and uncertainty among the parents about how to be involved. There was a sense that those parents who were already involved were closer to the school staff and knew about everything that was happening at the school. But parents who were new to the school or had not yet been involved did not know how to find out how to become involved. Parents seemed to feel uncertain or insecure about how and whom to approach to be involved. Again, the PTA seemed to be one way for parents to take on responsibilities and hear about what was happening at the school. But those who did not feel comfortable being in the PTA or could not attend because of time and other logistical considerations did not have another obvious route for initiating involvement. Some parents reported having called the school to offer their services either to the teacher or to the school and had not heard back.

What are the Facilitators of Involvement?

Parents also spoke positively about their involvement in their child's school, highlighting situations which made it easier for them to be involved. In one focus group in particular, the parents were overwhelmingly enthusiastic about how welcome they felt at the school:

> Some schools don't expect it. You know they haven't had it for so long they don't even expect and they don't even want it. A lot of schools don't want parents involved. This school expects it and they want it.
>
> You walk in and they're not looking at you like, "Why are you here?" They're looking at you like, "We're glad you're here."
>
> It's a real open school for parents, you know. It's not just for the kids. It's for us too. So we can just walk in here at any time and pick up a pass, go into our kids room.

One parent spoke of the principal in the following way, "[He] is an excellent principal. He loves his children. He loves his parents, loves this school." It was clear from these parents that feeling welcome and comfortable in the school was an important facilitator of participation just as not feeling welcome was a barrier.

A related facilitator of involvement was schools offering services and programs for the parents. Examples included parents being able to use the school's computer and media room to work on their own projects, use of the copy machine, and adult education programs to further their personal development. All of these services created a sense of good will between the parents and the school as well as helped make the parents feel more comfortable being on the premises. Since it was noted earlier that parents who were around the school were more likely to know what was going on with their kids and more likely to know about other events, it was clear that anything that brought parents in the door might lead to more involvement, even if it was not related to their child's education.

Programs and services for children were also viewed positively by the parents. Anything the school did to make their lives easier or better was noted with appreciation. Breakfast and lunch programs for income-eligible children, morning and after-school programs for working parents, and extracurricular programs for all children were services that parents made use of and noted their appreciation of in their discussions.

A final facilitator was parents' belief that their children really wanted them to be around. "I think he likes to have me around. . . .They are just eating it up. And I am going to take every moment of it and spend it here." Another parent commented, "It's not even the parents as much as the children. The children just glow and just love it when their mom's here or their dad's here."

School-Home Communication

The nature and extent of school-home communications was a popular topic of discussion among the parents in all of the focus groups. Although it was a subcategory under the discussion of types of contact, it deserves a fuller discussion here as parents infer a lot about the extent to which the school wants parents to be involved by the ways in which the school reaches out to families and parents in the school community. Moreover, the extent to which parents feel that the communication is two-way, in which there are opportunities for them as parents to provide feedback and input into the school also shapes their involvement.

The primary mechanism for schools to communicate with the families reported by parents was newsletters produced either by the school administration or the PTA. These newsletters provide parents with information about upcoming school events, important information about schedule changes, and perhaps news of district events such as budget hearings. The newsletters were either monthly or weekly and were typically sent home through the children (in one case they were mailed—which was considered unusual by the rest of the participants in that focus group). Thus, they were susceptible to being lost, misplaced, crumpled, and mishandled by the children, a complaint about other types of school and classroom information transmitted by the children. In addition to these standard updates, schools sent home to the parents (through the children) important reminder notices. For the most part, parents felt positively about the school's attempts to inform them, "I couldn't get too much information from the school." While parents appreciated this ongoing communication, many felt swamped by the volume of the paperwork sent home. One parent jokingly complained that it was a full-time job simply managing the paperwork that came home every day from her three children. Several parents wondered if there was a more efficient means of the school's management of paperwork. Not one parent complained that the paperwork was difficult to read or not in their language of choice (either because of sampling bias or lack of comfort in discussing literacy problems).

Communication between the child's classroom teacher(s) and the home also occurred on a regular basis and was a popular topic of conversation among the parents. Some teachers, following the example of the school, issued a weekly or monthly classroom newsletter informing the parents of class events and class progress on various projects and activities. Again, these were one-way communications from the teacher to the parents. They did not provide specific information about any particular child; rather they were general informational notices about class level activities and events. While parents enjoyed these newsletters, they really wanted communication between the home and the school regarding their child's progress, especially when it was positive. Some parents did receive positive feedback from their child's teacher, events which were remembered fondly and with great appreciation:

> I had an incident last year in second grade, three weeks into the school year and I got a phone call from this teacher. And it's like, "Hmmm, why is she calling me?" And she called to say, "I'm just telling you that you have a wonderful son." And it felt so good to get a call like that.

Most parents did not have such an experience, complaining that they only heard from the teacher or the school when there was a problem. They only heard the bad news and the complaints and not the good news and the appreciation. Parents were essentially grateful for any effort by the teacher to call or write the parent, be it positive or negative. Some teachers informed the parent at the end of every week about the child's missed assignments or problem areas that needed further work so that the parent could help the child. The child's homework and assignment books appeared to be the most common way for teachers and parents to have an ongoing dialogue about the child's progress and needs. Parents would write notes to the teacher if the child had an especially difficult time working on the homework and the teachers also used these books and papers as a vehicle for communicating with parents about the child's work habits and academic weaknesses:

> And every week the child brings home his notebook and the parent signs off on it. And if there is any negative comment or a kid has done something that week in school like maybe my son might have been too much in class or my son might have played too much or my son may not have listened that week, it would be in the notebook. I may be able to catch it on a weekly basis and to me that is good communication between the parent and the teacher.

As with everything else, there was variation in the extent to which parents were satisfied with these lines of communication. For some parents these back and forth notes between home and school were too negative and problem focused, too infrequent, and sometimes not responded to by the teacher, "Sometimes a parent will write a note and not get anything back from the teacher. So I think you need that communication going back and forth." Some parents perceived the school as only wanting to inform but not eager to hear back from the parents what they think. Also, parents noted that schools only send general information home and do not provide specific feedback and guidance to parents about their individual child. Those parents who picked their child up from the school used that time—however brief—as an opportunity to touch base with the teacher about the child's day.

In some schools parents and teachers talked on the phone in addition to the contact through the assignment and homework books:

> I usually call the teacher, sometimes at home because by the time I get home school is closed. So I have their phone numbers at home and I usually call them up at home and ask them what's been going on in the classroom or what's been going on with my child.

Many parents reported wanting more personal and individualized contact with their child's teacher. The parents in the schools where the teachers did call were aware of the benefits of this contact and were aware of the special effort it took on the part of the teacher to make this happen,

> And they'll let you know that your daughter's not doing what they expect of her. And then you should be glad that you have a teacher that will take the time to call you. And they call me and they let me know. And they will send a note home first and if you don't get that note they'll call you on the phone and say, "Well I sent a note home with your daughter."

Another issue on the topic of home-school communication was the desire for timely notification of problems. Many parents complained that they were not informed of problems until it was too late. From this, they inferred that the school did not really care about their child's success. Parents saw early notification as an opportunity to nip a problem in the bud, to help their child catch up before he or she gets too far behind, an opportunity to intervene before the problem becomes of crisis proportions. Parents, even those not typically involved, wanted the opportunity to intervene before it was too late. And because children did not always know when they were going to have a problem, the parents saw the schools as primarily responsible for informing the parents of emerging problems:

> When a parent finds out that a student is failing, usually it's already too late. That parent should be notified, like, after the second failing test, "Hey, I think we might have a problem here."
>
> Whereas here your child could have gotten in trouble and you'd not even know about it until maybe like the 10th time and then you find out about it and by then you know they're ready to kick your kid out.
>
> Yeah, they're doing fine. They're doing fine. Then they come up with a D. You know. How fine were they doing when I talked to you?

The final topic raised in discussion of home-school communication was the parent-teacher conferences scheduled by the school to provide the parent with progress information regarding their child's social and academic performance. These conferences were offered usually twice a year in the fall and spring and appeared to last around 15 minutes. Most parents felt that this was not enough time to have a meaningful discussion with the teacher, although they recognized that the teachers had many conferences to conduct.

How do Parents Want Schools to be Different?

The final question in the focus group asked parents to pretend that they could change any aspect of how the school related to them. Participants broke into small groups, discussed the topic, and selected three ways in which they would like schools to be different. Even though the question was specifically focused on how schools related to them, the parents' wish lists included several suggestions that did not specifically address the quality of the interaction between schools and homes. The parents made suggestions of how they wanted the schools in general to be different. The first three categories of more services, more communication, and better and safer facilities were the most popular choices across all of the focus groups. None of the other suggestions received the same degree of consensus.

Many parents mentioned a desire for the schools to offer children and parents more services and programs. A nurse on staff was a popular request among parents, especially those with special needs children who have ongoing medical conditions which the school was not trained or equipped to handle. Some parents told stories of their children being sent home because of a nose bleed because no one on staff was able to tend to the child. One parent worried that she would lose her job because of the frequency with which the school called her to pick up her child during the school day for what appeared to her to be minor medical incidents. Parents would prefer if there was someone on staff who could deal with medical incidents on-site should they arise. In that way children could resume the school day once they felt better rather than being sent home.

Another service parents called for was the building being open past school hours to be used as a community resource center for tutoring or special educational programs. More computers per child and more updated technology were concerns for parents who worried that their children were being left behind. Offering extracurricular activities either on school time or after school were popular suggestions such as sports programs, boy and girl scouts, and music lessons. Some parents also wanted more support services for their children, be it gifted programs, mental health counseling, or summer school for children who needed academic assistance.

The second area of improvement was in the type and extent of the communication between parents and schools (see Pryor, 1994). Parents wanted to be informed if homework was missing so that it did not become a problem. Parents wanted to know if their child was not performing well before the report card or progress report indicated a problem. Parents wanted to know when their child was not behaving well or doing well in school:

> I felt they went too long. She started at the beginning getting A's in Math and slowly started slipping and then I got the slip when she slipped!

If possible, parents would like to hear good things about their children's performance and behavior, not just the problems – what one parent called, "Happy Calls".

In addition to progress reports, parents wanted to know what was going to be taught over the course of the year so that they could have the opportunity to supplement their child's learning at school with at-home activities. They wanted to know what was expected of their child so that they could monitor progress and ensure more continuity between home and school. Ideally, that would go both ways in which the schools would hear from the parents what they expected their children to learn, but at a minimum, a way for parents to find out in advance what would be taught over the course of the year.

Another form of communication that parents wished for was personal contact with their child's teacher. "We need a weekly meeting with parents and teachers and everybody can get together and try to solve these problems." Another parent voiced the same wish, "Communication. That the assignment books are utilized every week or daily faxes or some way for communication on a real regular basis, but regular personal contact. Like meeting with teachers once a week or something." A third parent added, "A PAL program for teachers and parents if they got together at the end of the week. You sit around, you talk. I know we are dreaming here because these are things that are probably never going to happen, but it would be nice if they could." E-mail, homework hotlines, beepers, faxes, evening phone calls, and telephones installed in the classroom were all suggestions parents had for increasing the accessibility of the teachers to the parents. Parents were frustrated that teachers could not be reached during school hours because they were in class and they could not be reached after school hours because the building was closed, "We need the teachers' and aides' phone numbers because it's a problem trying to track them down. We would like to have their home phone numbers." Other than those parents who volunteered in the class and the times when parents came in for their 15 minute conference, parents had very little face-to-face contact with their child's teacher, or any personalized individual contact regarding their child:

> I know that's very difficult to do but if the teachers would have time set aside in their schedules to call parents once every three weeks, maybe six weeks. So that would be built in to the teacher requirements for their life and their

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> job then they would have time to do it and I think they would want to do it.

Safety and school maintenance was a third popular issue among the parents. There was no dispute; these parents wanted their children to be well cared for when they sent them off to school. Parents of younger children dealt with feelings of loss when their little ones went off to schools that seemed so big and anonymous. Parents wanted their children to be protected and nurtured as much as they wanted them taught and educated. Parents of older children had different concerns around safety. They were concerned about the "bad elements" that other children brought into the schools—be it drugs, guns, sex, or violence.

> Complete safety for all the children. They'd make sure that the school was always a safe haven for the kids.
> There should be a guard in every bathroom.
> Criminals should be ousted from the building permanently.
>
> I don't want my child to see guns and I don't want her to see drugs and I don't want her to see violence.

Every day these parents gave their children over to the school, usually a school that they did not choose. Most of these parents could not afford to send their children to private schools and most lived in districts where they could not choose which school their children attended. Thus, this was a situation in which they had relatively little control. At a minimum they wanted the school building to be well maintained and they wanted their children to come home at the end of the day no worse off then when they left for school in the morning. For some of these parents, even this wish did not come true. Every day their children were exposed to things in schools that they would rather them not see and were forced to handle situations for which they might not be ready. In their absence parents wanted schools to protect their children and keep them from harm, and schools could not always do this, especially as the children got older and were more likely to bring in their own negative experiences from their own homes and lives. Parents of middle school and high school students were the most worried about undue influences on their children as they struggled with the reality that their children were out there in the world, away from their protection.

This desire for the school to nurture and protect their children came out clearly when parents spoke of their wish for the school to interact differently with their children. In this category of responses, parents focused on the emotional content of the relationship between teachers and children and they expressed a desire for the teachers to care about their children, to love them and treat them with respect and concern.

> The teacher needs to make numerous positive comments, especially individual comments because even though they are in middle school they still have little baby hearts, they have not matured enough yet.
>
> It's like. . . more love, it's a way to show love. That's what I'm saying, show more appreciation for the child.
>
> We want everyone to know everyone's names like all the staff and faculty to know everyone's names, so that it would be like, "Hi Andrea, how are you?" you know, kids walk down the hall everyone on the security guards and everyone says, "Hi". You know it's like they're friendly and warm.

Parents had this image of a warm, caring, nurturing, and supportive environment in which their children were loved and appreciated. This was what they wished for their children while they were away from home for the greater part of the day. A few parents extended this theme by calling for more flexibility on the part of the school when disciplining children. The parents wanted the children disciplined with respect and with an eye towards promoting positive values not in a punitive or harsh manner in which the rule was more important than the student.

Another area in which the school could be different, according to some parents, was to be more welcoming and more "family friendly." Parents, too, wanted to be respected and treated as a valued person when they made contact with the school. They did not want to feel as if they were a nuisance and a bother but rather as someone who had something important to say. One parent told of a school secretary who became blatantly annoyed at her when she called to let them know that her daughter would be absent from school. Parents wanted to be able to come to the school any time, not just open house and parent-teacher conferences, they wanted to feel welcomed in the building. "As parents we need to be able to just walk in, you know and a teacher cannot tell us you can't come. You know it's an open thing. It's up to you as a parent." Another parent in the same group followed up by saying, "I want to be able to come in, not interrupt the class but you know to make sure that he's doing ok, everything's ok and I can really see how he's doing. For him I just want the doors to still be open, you know, no matter what grade he's in."

Parents wanted the teachers to individualize instruction, to pay more attention to the children who needed extra help, to provide more challenges for the children who were functioning at the top, and to be open to children's own unique way of learning. Parents wanted more flexibility in what the teachers expected of their children and more attention from the teacher to help their children perform at their maximum potential. As one parent described the ideal situation:

> Make sure that each child can get as much attention as possible using your parent volunteers and your assistants and any other adult volunteers that you have coming in.

Parents wanted teachers to monitor each child's progress and to allocate resources to whichever children needed them in order to make sure that each child mastered the material.

> It's similar to learning up to his or her potential. The teacher should recognize that your child needs more work and provide that for your child. I have a daughter who struggles so hard for just the homework she has. But your child who's much brighter, a teacher should somehow be able to differentiate and give more to the child that needs that extra challenge.

Parents also wanted the opportunity to provide input into teacher evaluations. This idea was a natural extension of the stories parents told of uncaring or incompetent teachers protected by the school administration. Parents wanted a voice in the process of evaluating teachers and wanted teachers to be accountable not just to the school system but also to the families with whom they worked:

> We were looking for something along the lines of teacher accountability. Too often from the time our children are in grade school or middle school, you come in and present a problem and the principal says, "Oh I know. We've got that frequently with that teacher. There's nothing we can do." There is a feeling on the part of the administration that they don't really have a lot of control over teachers. There is the union and things like that. If you have a bad teacher you can't get rid of, you just maybe move them to a school where the parents don't think to file. But there is not the accountability so I think we would love to see that.

Parents also wanted their children to be able to provide feedback about the teachers, the school, and the work that they are doing. "I feel that the feedback from the kids is missing now from all education systems." Parents believed that allowing children to provide input and feedback into their own education process would increase their motivation to learn and would provide them with greater self-esteem as they realized that they were respected and valued by the administration. "It would be really fun to see what would happen if we started letting the kids make decisions also about what it is they wanted to learn."

Several other wishes were expressed by only a few parents and were not commonly endorsed. For example, parents in a few focus groups put on their wish list a return to more traditional schools in which children wore uniforms and said prayers. Other less common wishes included higher salaries for teachers, more integration across the schools in a district, more training for teachers, more community involvement, more principal involvement at the classroom level, and less social stratification within a school. Parents of special needs children had a separate set of concerns relating to more training from the teachers in dealing with their children, higher expectations among the district for their children, and more vocational education programs.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Parents have had surprisingly little input into the national debate on parental involvement. There have been few opportunities for parents to meaningfully express their beliefs and share their opinions and ideas about this issue. Policies, programs, and practices have been developed based on others' ideas of what parents want and what they need to be effective partners in their children's education.

The parents who participated in these 16 focus groups had strong feelings about the topic of parent involvement in their children's education. They shared instances when their involvement was a positive experience, and when their involvement was frustrating and disappointing. In the many situations when parent involvement was mandatory or clearly called for from the school, such as conferences, PTA meetings, school events, programs, and fund raisers, parents tried hard to accommodate the school schedule, even when it was a hardship. But there were also instances in which the parent was not invited but desired contact either to right a perceived wrong or increase contact between home and school. In these circumstances, not all parents felt welcome or comfortable, and many felt the school did not appreciate their initiative. Participation was not perceived to be a two-way partnership. Many parents felt guilty when they could not be involved in ways encouraged by the school and angry when the school was not receptive to their initiation of involvement.

These parent focus groups provide a first glimpse into what parents are really thinking and feeling, and the results offered fruitful avenues for refining practice to be more in line with the realities of parents' lives. Based on the focus group discussions, the following six recommendations are offered as ways that schools can respond to the concerns raised by the parents.

Be clear about how and why parents can be involved.

Many parents don't know how to initiate involvement in the schools. Opportunities for involvement in addition to participating in the PTA could be made available for parents. The potential benefits of different types of involvement could be clarified for parents so that they can be better informed consumers and more efficiently allocate their limited time and resources.

Build on parent involvement at school programs.

Many parents attend back to school night and school programs in which their children perform. Schools could build on these opportunities for involvement by making meaningful connections with parents at these times, by extending invitations for other types of involvement, and offering opportunities for dialogue between parents and school staff.

The same holds true for parental participation in services offered by the school for parents, such as use of school computers, adult education courses offered on-site, and so forth. Such services appear to generate good will and may be avenues for ongoing school-home contact and interactions.

Create more opportunities for input from parents.

Few parents serve on committees and have opportunities to be decision-makers in schools. In order to increase parent representation, schools could create more and different opportunities to allow parents to provide their input. For example, schools could periodically survey parents about their perceptions of the school, how welcoming it is, ways to improve school-home communication, etc. Schools could also work with outside partners to conduct focus groups to learn about parents' thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Such activities would generate positive feelings among parents and would also provide valuable insight into ways that schools could be improved.

Provide parents with specific guidance about how to oversee homework and suggestions throughout the year for supporting their children's learning.

Many parents are unclear as to how much and in what ways to oversee their children's homework. Specifically, parents would like to know whether or not and in what ways to correct homework mistakes. Specific guidance on this issue would be perceived very positively by many parents. Such interactions would also enhance parent-teacher relationships.

Inform parents of behavioral and academic problems in a timely fashion.

Many parents feel that schools wait too long before notifying them of problems, which they perceive as a lack of caring on the school's and teacher's part. Clarity as to school policy on this issue would be welcome by parents.

Provide parents with positive feedback about their children.

Most school-home communication that is individualized is negative. Few parents receive any positive feedback about their children except at the brief and infrequent parent-teacher conferences, and maybe not even then. Schools could encourage teachers to provide positive feedback to parents at least once a year.

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Notes

[1] Focus groups were also conducted with teachers and principals, the results of which are presented elsewhere.

[2] Other activities included surveys of school district superintendents regarding parent involvement policies and practice, a critical review of the research literature, and a compilation of replicable programs.

[3] There are probably parents who are even less involved than those in the focus groups due to self selection into the project. Findings should be interpreted in that light.

[4] Based on pilot data collected for this project, this finding was not altogether surprising as some of those parents remarked that their children had difficulty attending to the teacher when they were in the classroom. Some children became angry when the parent took on a teacher's aide role and assisted other children rather than solely attending to them. Some parents felt they and their child needed more preparation for what volunteering in the class would entail.

[5] Parents might also benefit from being informed about recent research on effective homework practices (e.g., Clark, 1993).

[6] Kiley (1985) also found time to be a barrier to greater involvement.

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Improving Parent Involvement Programs and Practice: A Qualitative Study of Teacher Perceptions

Amy J.L. Baker

Recent major legislation — The Goals 2000: Educate America Act and the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) — has made parent involvement in their children's education a national priority. School districts nationwide are being encouraged to reexamine their parent involvement policies and programs and to demonstrate innovative initiatives in order to obtain federal education dollars. Partnerships are to be forged between homes, schools, and communities with an unparalleled level of contact and communication between parents and educators (United States Department of Education, 1994). The challenge now is for parents, educators, employers, policy makers, and community leaders to make these partnerships work.

While most researchers and practitioners agree that parent involvement is a requisite for children's school success (Epstein, 1985, 1995; Henderson & Berla, 1994), there is little consensus about what constitutes effective parent involvement. No one paradigm has emerged to dominate research and practice. Thus, confusion persists concerning the activities, goals, and desired outcomes of various parent involvement programs and practices. Moreover, parents and teachers have had surprisingly few opportunities to share their unique and valuable perspectives on what parent involvement means to them and what they need to make school-home partnerships work (however, see Kiley, 1995).

To address this issue, twelve Sections of the National Council of Jewish Women conducted focus groups with teachers to hear from the "voices from the field" about parent involvement. The goal of this study was to build on and extend the growing foundation of theory and practice con-

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cerning strengthening school-home collaborative partnerships (Davies, 1994; Epstein, 1995; Moles, 1993a; 1993b). These focus groups were one of four activities of *Parents As School Partners*, NCJW's volunteer research and action initiative exploring parent involvement to promote their children's school success.

Method

Focus groups were selected as the appropriate methodology to generate in-depth and rich information about the perceptions and experiences of teachers. As the goal was to highlight as many different issues, opinions, and perspectives as possible rather than testing specific research hypotheses, making decisions, reaching consensus, or generating quantitative data, focus groups were perceived as the best fit between available methodological choices and project goals (Morgan & Kreuger, 1993).

Twelve NCJW Sections conducted teacher focus groups. These Sections were diverse in size of membership and geography. NCJW volunteers received training through individual consultation, site visits, an in-depth how-to guide, a project newsletter, and ongoing intensive individualized technical assistance.

Fourteen focus groups were conducted for each; all classroom teachers from a selected grade in the participating school were invited to participate. In the event of too large a pool of teachers, participants were randomly selected. Each focus group was audiotaped and followed a similar format, including an introduction; signing of consent forms; opening, main, and summary questions; and completion of a background information form. Questions addressed types of contact parents have with schools, the conditions under which certain types of contact occur, their beliefs about parent involvement, and their perceptions of the schools interest in and attitudes towards their involvement. Eighty-seven teachers participated; 73 (84%) from elementary schools, 8 (9%) from middle schools, and six (7%) from high schools.

The audiotapes of the sixteen parent focus groups were transcribed verbatim, totaling over 400 pages of transcriptions. The transcripts were read and submitted to a content analysis in which each unit (idea, sentence, paragraph) was grouped together with similar thoughts and ideas. The groups of ideas were then classified according to topic. This process resulted in the development of six categories, with several sub categories within each larger one. These categories were partly based on the questions posed in the focus groups and partly based on other topics raised by the teachers over the course of the focus group discussions. The focus group questions served as a starting place for the dialogue and were not strictly research questions.

Results and Discussion

Ways Teachers Want Parents to be Involved

Teachers talked a great deal about what types of involvement they asked of the parents of the children with whom they worked. They had definite ideas about the type, frequency, and nature of the involvement that they wanted from their parents. At the most general level teachers wanted parents to support them in their efforts to educate their children. They spoke very strongly about how they asked parents to support them as professionals who have their child's best interest at heart. Below are examples of quotes from teachers speaking on this topic:

> . . . it is important for the parents to support the teachers and their decisions for homework and to encourage their children to do what they are asked to do.
>
> And I also ask them to support me in disciplinary actions. If I call and them and say, "Your child has been misbehaving today. Here is what he did." I want them to do something about it. I want them to either reprimand them at home or punish them, whatever would be appropriate. But I want there to be accountability. Not just that I called and they say, "Oh well, he's like that" or whatever. I want them to come through and support me and be in this together instead of having a conflict between us. You know, have us on the same side, in other words.
>
> We are doing it all and all we ask is for the parents' support.
>
> The big thing is support. You know, that's the main thing we want from our parents. If we're giving assignments, or we're doing projects in the room, all we really ask for is that the parents support us. If the kids are misbehaving, if we call, give us some satisfaction. We are here to do our jobs, what can you do at home so when your child comes, it will make it easier for us so that we're not the nurse, or social workers, or parents.

Teachers wanted to feel as if they and the parents were on the same team, working towards the same goal. They didn't want to feel as if what they asked of the parents fell into a black hole. They wanted to ask something of the parents and have the parents act on it, to pick up where the teacher left off in one seamless effort to educate children.

According to these teachers, they also asked parents to be involved and have contact with them and the school, to have what they call "open communication" with the teacher about the child. They asked that parents come to the school to observe the classroom and see how and what their child was doing. They asked that parents read the newsletters and other classroom level and school level information sent home so that they could be informed as to school events and activities their child was involved with. As several teachers discussed:

Teacher One:	I would want them involved in the child's education. Come in the classroom. See what's going on. Follow-up with them. Come back in. . . That's all I ask.
Teacher Two:	And I vote for that too!
Teacher Three:	There you are!
Teacher four:	Yeah!

> As another teacher put it: I ask that they find out what they're doing on a daily basis. That they take an active involvement in finding out and participating in any way that they can to help their own child in the school.

Teachers expressed a desire for parents to come to school more often and see what the children were doing and to be involved in any way with the child's education that would be beneficial to the child.

Teachers also wanted to be informed if there was something special going on with the child that might be useful for understanding the child and his/her behavior. Again, open communication could work in both directions according to the teachers. They had information about the child's school life that the parent could pick up on and build on to help the child learn. Similarly, the parents had information about the child's home life that might be of use to the teacher in his/her efforts to understand and work with the child. Teachers asked that the parents share that information with them so that they could be more effective in their job.

There was no question that parents helping their children with homework was the most popular form of requested involvement from these teachers. While not all teachers wanted the parents to actually assist with the content of the homework, they did want the parents to monitor that the homework was done and to ensure that it was sent to school. The teachers wanted the parents to care about whether homework was completed and to convey that care and interest to the child as another means of the home life and school life working together to support the child's education. A popular technique one teacher used was requesting that parents sign the homework sheet on a daily basis. Teachers also wanted parents to provide structure and support for the child doing the homework, by providing a quiet place for it to be done and by setting rules as to when it gets done in the course of the evening. Teachers did not want parents (even those of older elementary school-aged children) to leave the entire responsibility of the homework in the hands of the child. Interestingly, several teachers noted that parents did not know how much to correct their child's work and how much to let the children make their own mistakes. The teachers were clear that parents should not actually do the homework but acknowledged that for some parents there was a gray area between doing it for the child and providing concrete assistance to the child. As one teacher put it:

> [We] ask a lot of judgement of the parents . . . on a second grade level, we want them to still help with homework, but we also want them to encourage their children to be building independence and responsibility. So they and I both have to figure out how often are they supposed to pull the papers out of the back pack, how often are they supposed to go over things and make sure the assignments are done. We don't want them doing it for them, but we don't think the children can operate entirely independently either. So we ask a lot of them in the way of judgement and responsibility as well. We ask a lot really.

While teachers wanted parental involvement in the homework, they believed that some parents took this too far and could not let their children make their own mistakes because they were "overinvested" in their child's school performance. Teachers wanted to see how the children were doing on the homework not as a means of testing the child but as a mechanism for seeing whether the child understood the work. When parents corrected all of the child's homework, the teacher missed this key information and feedback about the child's progress.

Interestingly, while all the teachers commented on the importance of parents overseeing homework, few mentioned an explicit rationale for this belief. Teachers appeared to believe in the importance of homework per se and assign homework so that children could consolidate and practice what they had learned during the day in school. It was implied in many of the teachers' statements that elementary school children were not mature enough to monitor their own homework and that parents needed to organize their child's space and time to see that the homework got done. Therefore, parental involvement served the purpose of facilitating the child doing the work. In addition, one teacher noted that when parents helped with homework, children would see their parents as educators, which presumably was a positive experience for the child.

Surprisingly, in only three of the focus groups did teachers mention asking parents to read to their child in response to the question of what they ask of parents. Although a few other teacher's responses fell into a similar category of "everyday learning" in which teachers asked parents to make every day a learning experience, "You know all day can be a teaching day for children." Still, this area was under-represented in the teachers' comments either because they were not asking this of parents or because it was so obvious none bothered to mention it.

Several teachers mentioned asking parents that the children come to school on time and ready to learn, "The main thing is that I ask them to get them to school. That's a big thing." Another teacher elaborated by saying,

> Well, I ask parents to send their children to school ready to learn and that entails a number of things. Being healthy, having been well rested the night before, dressed to learn. Nourished, not full of candy, not with a lunch of candy. That's before they even get the first lesson.

Another teacher broadened the concept of ready to learn by saying,

> Give them confidence so when they come in they see themselves as winners, as able and competent. That their parents have been positive with them . . . . o.k., when the child walks in the door, the best thing the teacher can have is a child that says, "I'm receptive, I'm ready to learn. My parents have made me feel good about myself so my thoughts aren't torn between what's happening at home and not angry because I've been put down. I'm not tired . . . "

Teachers also mentioned asking parents to teach their child values and proper behavior and social skills so that they did not have to devote school time to teaching the children these basic skills.

These comments were related to another set of requests teachers made of parents, to love and encourage their children, "Well my first thought when you asked the question, my thought was what do I want from the parent. I want that parent to talk to that child, and love their child. And I guess in a way it's the same kind of thing, talk to him, listen to him, and hug him a lot." Another teacher emphasized that parents should have expectations for their children's school success and that they should encourage their children to learn and achieve, "Yeah, I would agree that's the first thing is just getting them to believe in their children first of all." As another teacher stated, "You just have to convince some of the parents . . . that you know their children can do better than they have and that they should plant these seeds, not just the teachers." The seed metaphor was drawn upon in the following statement as well:

> And I think planting the seed of high expectations. If they are in a low income family, if they are a welfare family, to plant that seed that there's much more out there for you. This isn't the end all and be all, you can be anything you want. I had a little girl once that I thought was a great student. She read and she did math problems. She was more interested in boys, in the first grade. She was already into boys. And she doesn't care. She doesn't see beyond, you know. . . . The family is reinforcing that girls are petite and pretty and for boys there is a whole other world out there. And, you know, I thought it was really sad because she's going to probably be married at 16 or you know be a mom at 16. It bothers me because I think the opportunities are there if the seeds are planted.

Another teacher from the same group commented that, "Parents have to help plant that seed. We're not the only seed planters."

And finally, a few teachers mentioned asking parents for concrete assistance such as making donations to the classroom for special projects or helping with transportation on field trips.

School-Home Communication

The topic of school-home communication was frequently mentioned in these focus groups. Six different yet overlapping forms of school-to-home communication were discussed by the teachers.

The first type of contact mentioned were scheduled meetings and conferences offered by the school at various points throughout the school year. These took two forms, general orientation meetings for the entire parent population or for all of the parents within a certain class or grade, and individualized scheduled conferences between the parent and the teacher to discuss the child's progress. Teachers felt that these scheduled events were important ways to inform parents about school rules, general expectations for children's behavior and performance, as well as to discuss any particular issues arising with a specific child. The major comment from the teachers about these meetings was that not all parents attended and that usually the ones who did attend did not need to because their child was doing fine. The children who were struggling behaviorally or academically had parents who did not attend parent-teacher conferences, according to these teachers. The lack of attendance at these meetings was interpreted as a sign of apathy or lack of interest in the child's education, which was viewed as contributing to the child's academic problem. Most teachers felt that while parents may have barriers to participation (see barriers section below), that parents could get to a meeting if they really wanted to and that lack of attendance was a sign of disinterest on the part of the parent.

The second type of school-home communication was informal meetings between teachers and parents, which occurred because the parent was already on the premises either volunteering in the classroom or dropping off/picking up the child. While teachers did not want to be expected to attend to a parent who happened to drop by informally, if the timing was right for them they would step outside the classroom for a few minutes and chat with a parent. Teachers saw one of the secondary benefits of parents volunteering in the classroom (see benefits section below) as this opportunity for informal meetings. Again, those parents who participated had opportunities for greater participation, creating a positive cycle of interaction between parents and school.

Phone calls with parents were mentioned by most of the teachers as a common form of school-home communication. Not many mentioned parents calling them, most discussed the advantages of them placing the calls to the parents, especially in the evening. While on teaching duty, most teachers did not have access to telephones and found the evenings a more conducive time to reach parents, especially those who worked outside the home themselves during the day.

Teachers called parents for several reasons. Some called parents at the beginning of the year to introduce themselves and to share with the parents their expectations for the upcoming year:

> Well what I do usually at the beginning of the school year is I take time to call every one of my parents. . . I let them know what my expectations are and what I'd like for them to do to help me. If I send home a word list or if I send home

> facts or something, spelling words, that I'd appreciate it if they'd spend time each night helping the child to learn them.

Other teachers called to remind parents of special events, to discuss behavioral and adjustment problems, as well as to provide positive feedback to the parent (also see discussion of how teachers try to encourage involvement through praise and positive feedback):

> I call parents. I make a lot of phone calls. I will sit there with my book called the behavior book and I write down every time I call them and what they say. And if I have a student not doing so well on tests, I will call and report that and then I will be making three or four phone calls and then three or four of the other type. And I really get a good response when I call somebody who's never been called for anything good. And after that the student seems to really buckle down because they know I'm calling and saying something good to their parents, and their parents are really proud. And if I make one about a bad grade, if something good happens then I try and call and tell them about that so that they know that I am checking both sides.

Those teachers who did have access to telephones in their classrooms reported the benefits of being able to reach a parent at a moments notice when a discipline issue arose. The immediate access to parents appeared to work for teachers who felt that children need to be reprimanded and see that the parents are going to support the teachers as soon as the incident occurs rather than waiting until the child gets home from school and the parent gets home from work. Most teachers did not have the luxury of access to telephones in their classroom.

The fourth form of contact mentioned by these teachers were home visits. Teachers in only two of the focus groups reported either making home visits themselves or that the school staff included a home visitor. This was not a common form of contact between teachers and parents and was seen as increasingly problematic given the harsher and more dangerous living conditions of some of the families attending schools. Teachers indicated their fear of visiting the homes of their families.

A fifth form of contact commonly mentioned by the teachers entailed sending written information home concerning the child's progress, be it problem areas or areas of improvement. Portfolio assessments, report cards, or progress reports were sent home to inform parents of their child's progress throughout the school year. However, schools and teachers varied in the frequency of the information sent home. Many teachers felt that by sending corrected homework assignments home, the parent had sufficient information regarding the child's curriculum and progress. Some teachers also sent home daily notes to the parents about the child's behavior. In general teachers felt that they communicated regularly and sufficiently with the parents regarding their child's school performance, as the following quotes suggest:

> I think we communicate with the parents a great deal. We send a lot of written information home to them and ask for a signature on it. Our kids have assignment books where they write assignments in them and parents should be looking over those.
>
> We send behavior forms home. We have a standardized form for the entire grade level. And any behavior problems are indicated on that daily basis and then that's signed on a weekly basis so that the parent should be aware of their academic progress as well as their behavior progress on at least a weekly basis.
>
> We do communicate a lot in written form with the parents and so whether they really take the time to read it or not we really don't know.
>
> Especially at the beginning of the year a lot of information goes home.
>
> I like to keep parents involved in what's going on in my classroom and if we take tests or have a project I send letters home and I have them sign all of the major tests that we have, whether they are good or bad, so they get used to seeing them.
>
> I'm constantly sending those notices with funny pictures and whatever. I do at least three a day for the good children.
>
> I do a behavior modification and I've broken up the day into every fifteen minutes and in those blocks I either put a happy face or a sad face. And the parents have to sign it every day and they'll know. You can see if a pattern is being developed.

These teachers reported sending a considerable amount of information home to the parents, some of which was general information about school and classroom level activities. But some of this information was individualized, reflecting the child's behavioral and academic performance. Many of these teachers reported spending a fair amount of time on this task and worried if any of it made a difference. They felt that they had no way of knowing whether or not parents read the information or made use of it. However, it was also not clear what they expected parents to do with this information.

These teachers did not mention a policy of calling parents when the children were not doing well in order to prevent a child from failing. Some teachers did this through phone calls but it appeared to be left to the teachers discretion to take the time and effort to make such a phone call. It may not have been school policy to inform parents when an academic or behavior problem emerged. Perhaps teachers felt that sending home the failed test or the poorly graded homework assignment was sufficient notification to the parents concerning the child's performance.

A final form of school-home communication was written documents concerning the school's policies and the teachers' expectations for the upcoming year. Teachers felt that it was important for parents to know what to expect for the upcoming year as they would then be better able to be involved and helpful to the child.

Benefits of Involvement

The reason teachers asked so much of parents was because they perceived there to be many important benefits to parental involvement in their children's education. The benefits of involvement fell into three general categories: benefits of parental help at home through the home learning environment, benefits of involvement in the classroom and school building, and benefits of involvement through communication with the teacher about the child's education. For the most part, teachers talked about the benefits of the first type of parental involvement: involvement in the child's education at home. There was consensus among all of the teachers that they could not do the job alone; they needed the parents to teach the child. The learning and preparation that takes place at home was viewed by the teachers as an important corollary to what they were trying to accomplish with the children during the school day. They saw learning in school and learning at home as one continuous stream of educational experiences for the child. The more learning and support for learning that takes place at home, the more motivated and interested in learning the child would be in school. When teachers spoke of the benefits of involvement they were referring to parental interest in and support of their child's education at the broadest possible level which then translated into situation-specific behaviors when appropriate such as helping with homework, reading to the child, taking the child to the library, making learning an every day activity, and all of the other parental behaviors that teachers would like to see. Below are examples of the types of statements teachers made on this topic:

> Parental support is a necessity, really. It really is a necessity. And I think that the school would be a lot better if we had more parental support for what goes on in school.
>
> The ones that are read to whether there are books in the home or if the parents go to the library and check out books, may not be the first reader but they get there . . . they have the interest.
>
> The children are better because their parents show an interest.
>
> I have to tell the parents, almost all through the year, I have to tell them that I can't do it alone. I cannot educate your children all by myself. I need attention to homework. If they're having problems in areas and need support and extra work with that . . . .

Teachers believed that it can make a tremendous difference for the child just how involved the parent is. Parental involvement made their job easier in that the children were better prepared to be learners, had more of a foundation to build on in terms of skills and knowledge, and the children's problem areas were addressed before getting out of hand. For the most part, these benefits were seen to come about through parental attitudes and behaviors that took place outside of the classroom but which affected the child's behavior in school. Teachers focused on parental support and encouragement behind the scenes, so to speak.

Involvement in the classroom and the building was also seen as having benefits to the child and to the teacher. For example, when parents came to the school and were involved through volunteering in the child's classroom, teachers believed that this sent a powerful message to the child about the value of education, indicated by this exchange among two teachers:

> "Coming into the school sends a big message to the children . . ."

"It sure does"

". . . in terms of where the priorities of school are."

Simply by parents being there, the child realized that parents care about the school and about what the child was learning and doing there. Presumably this valuing of education would translate into more effort and greater motivation on the part of the child as he/she realized that what happened at school mattered at home. Some parents conveyed that education was important even when they did not volunteer, but nothing matched the physical presence of the parents, according to these teachers, to show the child that school was important.

Volunteering was seen as having another benefit as well: providing opportunities for increased contact between the teacher and the parent. Teachers reported that parents who volunteered in their classroom received additional attention from the teacher regarding the child's progress and performance as a natural outgrowth of increased contact. This was seen by the teachers as benefiting parents who were eager for additional feedback about their child as well as the teacher who might have one less phone call or letter to write if the parent was caught during the day for an important discussion. As these teachers described it:

> It's hard to be making phone calls all the time because lots of times they're not home when you call them. Or writing those notes is time consuming. I tried that one time. I tried you know, I'm gonna keep in touch and I'm going to write this many this week and it just doesn't work. So, if they're coming in and you get to see them from time to time, you have that opportunity to talk to them.
>
> You have many conferences. You end up having many, many conferences and talking with the parent about how the child's doing or "Oh, hey Kay, they really liked this last week" or "Bo's so excited about the farm day coming up" Or something like that.

Some teachers noted that a benefit for the parent who volunteered was the opportunity to watch how the teacher handled the classroom and perhaps pick up some tips on interacting with children. In addition, some teachers explicitly provided parenting tips and pointers to parents who volunteer:

> Sometimes as teachers we find ourselves giving parents a certain amount of parenting skills and making suggestions to parents if they are having difficulties with their children. Usually I'll ask how the child responds at home in a particular situation . . . How do you deal with that as a parent. And then we give some things as to what our rules and regulations are for school. And we let them know that rules and regulations for school may be a little bit different than yours but the school child should be able to accommodate both, should be able to fit into both areas, that there are rules in certain places that they have to follow. And here again, sometimes giving ideas, extra ideas that you may have that a parent can work with the child at home, I find it's a support.

A third benefit to volunteering perceived by the teachers was the chance for parents and teachers to develop trust and rapport. That way, if a problem should arise the parent might not assume the worst of the teacher. The parents might approach a potential problem with more good will if they knew and, presumably liked, the teacher. Given how difficult it appeared to be for parents and teachers to resolve problems once they arose, this may be a potentially important benefit of parent classroom volunteering. As one teacher explained:

> I find that there is an element of trust the more a parent is in the classroom for other reasons. So that, when there is a problem, then the problem does not get blown out of proportion. It sort of has a ripple effect too if three parents come in to help with a project then you know it sort of establishes a bond with those three parents . . . . The ripple effect goes out because each of those three parents has friends in the community so that when a problem arises, it's diminished significantly because someone trusts the teacher and if someone knows someone who trusts the teacher then [she] is more likely to trust the teacher.

Another benefit to volunteering mentioned by a few teachers was that parents might develop more respect for what teachers did if they saw first hand the challenges associated with the job. To some extent teachers felt that the community—which included parents—did not realize how difficult it was to be a classroom teacher:

> I think that if parents were more involved, did come to school and did see what we do, then they would treat us as this professional person who's up there trying to better my child's education, trying to help my child as opposed to this bad guy, this teacher who's always calling me about him or her not finishing their homework or not behaving in class.

> Yeah well a lot of them have a parent volunteer and then they see for themselves that it is not easy.

One teacher mentioned that when parents volunteered in her classroom she gained greater insight into the behavior of the child, which she found useful in her work with the children. Observing the quality of the parent-child relationship and the nature of their interactions provided her with a context for understanding the personality of the child.

Parental involvement was seen to benefit the teachers and the classroom as parents shared their resources and talents with the school. Parents were seen as an untapped rich resource of skills and talents, which could greatly improve the school. Parents helped not only in their child's classroom but also in the school building doing essential tasks, such as aiding in the lunchrooms, library, and playground. Without parents taking on these roles, the job would not get done. Teachers were grateful for parental efforts in this area. Parental energy, enthusiasm, and support for the classroom and the school building were seen as vital resources. Fathers were seen as particularly valuable as they could serve as a role model for male students in the classroom.

The third type of involvement benefits discussed was communication between the home and the school, specifically between the parent and the teacher.

Phone calls, as a mechanism of communication, was a popular topic of conversation among the teachers. Phone calls with the parent were seen as having a different type of benefit than volunteering. With phone calls teachers focused on the ability to make immediate connection with the parent around a discipline issue. Immediate feedback from the parent to the child was seen as an important way to nip a problem in the bud, to let the child know that he or she could not get away with poor behavior. Teachers worried that by the time the child came home from school and the parent came home from work that the problem would be forgotten, confirming to the child that bad behavior was not punished. Teachers wanted to be able to access parents at the moment of the problem in order to maintain control in their classroom. As two teachers commented:

> Many of our academically at-risk students haven't developed very good study habits, be it at home or in the school and the phone makes it much easier for them to be convinced that, "Hey, there's really not going to be a legitimate chance that this teacher's going to get tired by the end of the day and not call to say I didn't do my homework." And that makes our job much easier . . . It becomes quite a beneficial tool, at least for me it has when it comes to the discipline approach to children who need some type of immediate reinforcement that the behavior is not acceptable . . . . I was always a firm believer [that] if a child has exhibited behavior that in my opinion calls for a reprimand, it's important that the reprimand comes swiftly and not hours later.
>
> . . . That's a very strong help for us teachers when it comes to not only keeping in touch with parents but for the children to realize that to say, "We are going to call your parents after school" doesn't hold true in this building any longer; we are going to call them now. Most of us have developed a technique where we've taught them how to dial 9 and dial their own parents . . . . "Now you have to call her at home and tell her what you did!"

It appeared that simply the specter of the parents hearing of their misconduct might be enough to help children behave better. Being able to access the parents during the day at the moment when they were needed was a form of contact greatly appreciated by the teachers who had phones within easy access to their classrooms. Of course, for this system of immediate feedback to work, it was assumed that parents would support the teacher in the assessment of the child's behavior and convey that disapproval to the child. This relates directly to the topic of what teachers ask of parents (discussed earlier) in that teachers want parents to support them on disciplinary issues. If the parent had a different perspective on the child's classroom behavior or if the parent did not have a firm enough parental style to follow through on punishment, accessing parents would not be particularly helpful.

Many teachers spoke of the benefits of all types of communication between parents and teachers for clearing up misunderstandings. Teachers were aware that children moved between two worlds, the world of school and the world of home and that for the most part these two worlds did not come together. Thus, children have an enormous amount of control in the type of information that was carried from home to school and from school to home. Teachers were aware that children did not always accurately (either because they were young or because they were less than honest) convey information from school to home. Teachers seemed to think that many parents were quick to assume that the teacher was out to hurt the child and that teachers would unfairly exert their authority over the children in the classroom. Thus, to these teachers, communication between home and school was useful to the extent that misunderstandings and miscommunications could be clarified.

Barriers to Involvement

Teachers also spoke of barriers to involvement, aware of the logistical barriers to greater involvement on the part of the parents, especially at school. Transportation, especially in districts where children are bussed to school, was mentioned by more than one teacher as a barrier. Parental work schedules were also noted by the teachers as a factor that made coming to the school a challenge. One teacher, a mother herself, sadly noted that she had to miss many opportunities to be involved at her child's school in order to fulfill her obligations as a teacher. She could not attend PTA meetings, assemblies, and events that took place during the day. In addition to logistics from the point of view of the family, teachers also noted logistical considerations that limited *their* ability to involve and access parents. Disconnected phone numbers or families not having telephones was a major complaint among the teachers who wanted to call parents in the evening to touch base with them about their child's progress and/or to discuss an emerging problem with which they would like the parent's assistance and support. The fact that the parents could not be reached was frustrating for the teachers. In addition, some families moved several times over the course of the school year. Thus, information sent home through the mail was often returned. According to the teachers, parents with the more chaotic lifestyles (moving, disconnected phone service, etc.) were also the parents who did not come to parent teacher conferences. Thus, teachers felt that they had no means of accessing parents should the need arise. For many teachers, the back to school night event, which typically draws a big crowd, was the one time during the entire school year when they saw many parents. Another logistical issue was lack of sufficient time for scheduled conferences. Many teachers did not have a classroom assistant or aide so that when a parent called or dropped by for an impromptu discussion, the teacher could not leave her class unattended to take advantage of the opportunity for greater communication between the parent and teacher.

Teachers also noted that many parents wanted to be more involved in their child's education but did not seem to know how to make that happen, "And we know that they really want the best for their kids but a lot of times they don't know how. That's a real stumbling block for us to help them help their kids." Parents with limited formal education were seen as being at a particular disadvantage because, especially as their children get older, they did not understand their child's school material. Even if they knew how to solve a homework problem themselves, they were not necessarily skilled at teaching their children how to solve the problem. In other words, teachers saw that some parents needed training in how to be an aide or assistant to their child. The teachers did not want the parents doing the homework for the children, and they did not want the parent leaving it entirely up to the children to manage their own work. Teachers wanted parents to provide support and structure, which they realized many parents may not have the skills or confidence to be able to do.

Teachers also noted that some children limited parental involvement. As the children got older they did not want their parents hanging around in the classroom or even in the school. Some teachers recognized that preadolescence was a delicate time when children were easily embarrassed by their parents. They wanted the experience of independence and separation and may request that their parents not attend field trips or volunteer in the classroom.[1] Conversely, parents may limit their involvement at school if they perceived that it was too difficult for the child to handle having them in the classroom. Several teachers noted that some children become immature and had difficulty separating from their parents. They could no longer concentrate on the work in the classroom when their parents were present. In these situations teachers requested that the parent not volunteer in the classroom.

Many teachers also discussed that parents of older children appeared to be less involved than parents of younger children, and that parents of later born children were less involved than parents of first born or only born children. The teachers believed that as children got older, parents became "burnt out" from being heavily involved in the classroom and the school. Moreover, as children matured their parents were more likely to return to work and therefore have less time for involvement in the school. In addition, some teachers believed that parents lost interest in their children's educational progress as they matured, especially if they believed that older children did not require the same level of attention and assistance as younger children. Parents incorrectly assumed, these teachers said, that their children were able to manage their own educational development once they reached middle school. One teacher sadly noted that as the children got older the parent became more discouraged and disappointed with them and therefore became less enthusiastic about their schooling:

> The parents are less discouraged at the lower grades especially if it is their first child. I mean for the first day of school we have everybody bringing their kids. They are standing at the door with them and then as it goes along they send 'em out a little bit more and then as each year, they give 'em more and more independence until by the time they're in sixth grade they've given them all the independence you need. In fact, "Don't call me unless he does something wrong."

In general, teachers believed that the older the child was, the less motivated and interested the parent became in their education. There were several stories of conference nights when only two parents showed up or times when teachers were available for phone conferences and only a handful of parents made use of the opportunity. Waning involvement in middle schools was a sad fact of life for these teachers.

Only a few teachers broached the subject that parental involvement was limited by the quality of the interaction between the schools and homes. When this topic was raised most teachers insisted that parents were welcome in the school. However, some teachers felt that certain school practices instituted to protect children from intruders (having to check in at the office, having to wear a visitor's pass, and having to schedule visiting times) may act as impediments to involvement by the parents. Some teachers believed that not all teachers and schools were as welcoming as parents might want them to be and one teacher shared her belief that some teachers in her school were afraid of parents and did not invite them into the school as much as they could. Other teachers commented that while the school might try to be welcoming, many parents have had their own negative experiences as a student and were, therefore, hesitant to be involved in their child's school. For them, simply being in a school building made them feel bad, stupid, or incompetent. The school was a place to avoid, not a place to seek out. The teachers saw these negative feelings as an impediment:

> Some parents are very much in avoidance of contact with schools because they do not perceive schools as a positive place. All of us in this room have had more than one altercation with a given parent or set of parents who refuse to deal with their child because they are too busy dealing with us.

How Teachers Try to Encourage Involvement

In recognition that there were barriers to involvement, teachers discussed ways in which they tried to increase involvement, to make it more likely that parents would be a part of their children's education. Teachers mentioned several strategies for getting parents into the classroom. First, teachers tried to entice parents with special projects in the hopes that once they were inside the classroom they would see that it was fun and important and beneficial to their children that they be involved. Teachers requested parental assistance with special projects that the class was working on as a tool to break the ice with the parent.

Second, teachers mentioned trying to make coming to school easy and convenient for the parents, to work around the logistical barriers of transportation, childcare, and work schedules. As one teacher said,

> I have an open door policy. I like to grab them anytime that I can. I want them to be involved. I want them to see what I am doing with their kids. I want them to know what their kids are learning . . . I was at a school before where you had to have time slots written in for parents to come in. Here I had to change that because whenever they come they come in.

Some teachers mentioned being persistent, writing notes home requesting help, calling to remind parents that they offered to participate in a certain project, and providing several different opportunities for involvement in the event that parents were comfortable with only certain types of involvement (e.g., volunteering in the classroom, going on field trips, teaching the class an art project). Any way to get the parents in the door was tried by some of the teachers, especially those who perceived strong benefits to the children and to the school when parents were involved. Below are examples of such statements:

> I think projects are what bring parents into the classroom in a non-direct way. And we kind of do the same thing. Early in the year we announce the kinds of projects we'll have throughout the year and to send materials in. For example, wrapping paper tubes for when we make the parthenon and a colonnade and those sorts of things. Well, the parents like to bring them in and they also like to stick around and construct the thing in class.

> And you know going on a lot of field trips and just pleading, being pathetic you know just. . . you need them; you can't do without them.
>
> Sending newspapers, and just sort of not taking no for an answer, being a real nudge, you know, not taking no for an answer.

Other teachers mentioned parent volunteer programs within their schools in which parents could come and sign up for different volunteer opportunities on an ongoing or as-interested basis. That way neither the teacher nor the parent had to think up ways for the parent to be involved; the parent was guaranteed to be in a place where a contribution could be made and in a place where s/he was comfortable. Other teachers mentioned trying to make sure that the tasks parents were given in the classroom were manageable and were within their skill and interest level, so that they would have a positive and successful experience. One teacher had a table in her classroom with projects for parents to work on any time they came into her classroom. These tasks were simple enough so that any parent could do them and feel good about involvement.

Teachers also emphasized the importance of creating a positive relationship with the parents as a way to increase and improve their involvement. They saw this working in two ways. First, a good relationship would make parents more comfortable to be in the classroom. Second, a good working relationship between the parent and teacher would be helpful in case a problem arose with the child which the teacher would need to discuss with the parent. Below are examples of such statements:

> You start off calling for good reasons to start with so when you have to call for the bad ones because you already know I care about your child otherwise I wouldn't even waste my time. I wouldn't be calling because you know I've called before because I think this child is wonderful. . . and then they can't help but listen to you when you say you have a problem about something.
>
> . . . so that the first interaction with that parent isn't negative and it is not you calling to complain about their child. And if they've heard that you can be positive and take the time to call them for something good or just say hello in the beginning then it helps them be more supportive later on when you do call and have to get on them to complain.

> . . . and then you know when the more formal conferences come, you know the rapport's already established.

Calling parents to share positive feedback about the child was seen as an effective parent involvement motivator, not just to establish rapport before a discipline problem arose, but also as a way to excite parents about their child's progress. Some teachers were aware that the majority of contact with the parent was around problems, negative feedback, discipline, or academic issues. These teachers discussed the benefits of making regular contact with the parents that was more positive, such as improvement reports in which a child's gains are shared with the parent. Newsletters from the teacher to the parent about exciting classroom projects and activities were other attempts teachers made to have non-problem and non-issue focused interactions with parents.

And finally, a method of improving parent involvement that teachers spoke about was joint problem solving. When a problem did arise, some teachers tried to bring parents into the process. Rather then telling parents how the problem should be addressed, they asked parents to participate in problem solving. It was hoped that if parents were part of the process, they would be more likely to implement whatever action steps were decided upon. As one teacher noted, teachers cannot tell parents what to do with their children outside of school hours, even when it comes to handling homework. They can make suggestions but they need to recognize that families have their own rules and way of doing things, which needs to be respected as much as the school way of doing things. One teacher's comments exemplified this way of thinking when she said,

> I think the problem and the solution has to be discussed with the parent because everybody's got a different lifestyle and everybody works differently with their children within their family.You have one-parent families you have grandparents raising kids. So, I think input . . . . This child has to be able to come back with his homework. How can we, according to the way you are living, how can we help this child, you know, get their work done.

Teachers mentioned trying to be respectful of parents, acting naturally, and being warm and friendly towards them in order to make the parents feel relaxed and at ease in their presence. Teachers recognized that for many parents, there was potential for parents and teachers to have an adversarial relationship. There was no assumption of trust and good will. Teachers had to consciously make a special effort to develop a rapport with the parents of the children they teach. Trying not to talk down to them if they were less educated was also mentioned as a tool for rapport-building, as was thanking the parents for everything that they did and praising their efforts to be involved, be it at home or in the classroom: "Praising them, sending them thank you notes absolutely all the time as soon as they've done something." When one teacher was asked how she tried to increase involvement by parents in her classroom she said, "Well you tell them what they are doing right." As teachers, they understood the importance of positive feedback and reinforcement and they applied that to their work with parents.

How Parent-Teacher Relationships Could Be Different

The final question in the teacher focus groups was about what could be different about the way that parents related to them. Their responses fell into six general categories. First, teachers expressed a desire for improved communication between home and school. Some teachers envisioned communication in which parents would provide feedback to the teachers about how their parent involvement felt. Teachers felt frustrated when parents come to the classroom either to volunteer or for a conference and the parent walked away at the end giving no indication to the teacher about how it felt for them:

> I always wish they would give me some feedback, if they are coming for some lesson or something and they just sit down and then walk out. I want to know some reaction. Of course, I want it to be positive but even if it is not I'd like them to say, "Why did you do this?" Instead of just wondering what is going on in their minds.

Some teachers felt awkward having parents visit their classroom and perhaps insecure about what parents were thinking about them. Some teachers felt judged and evaluated by parents and wanted to know how the visit was perceived by the parent. Moreover, they felt that some misperceptions parents might have about their teaching technique could be clarified if the parents chose to share their questions and concerns with the teachers.

Other teachers felt that the communication could be improved if parents shared with the teachers information about the child's home life in order to provide a context for the child's behavior or performance in the classroom:

> If there is a problem you need to share it with me. I need to know what is happening because it does affect what they're doing and if I notice a difference, I'm going to think what in the world is going on?

As another teacher put it:

> Just keep the lines of communication open. What might be bothering the child outside of school we don't know about that might be influencing the child in school.

Other teachers expressed an interest in more communication, especially around supporting the child's academic work and in clearing up misunderstandings that the children might inadvertently create between the parent and teacher. As one teacher said:

> Normal contact. I'd like to be able to call and say, "Barry was late to class today. Can you please talk to him about it? This is the third time Barry's been late to class," or "Sue got her homework done today and I really appreciate you helping her." Just normal contact. Normal contact.

The second wish from the teachers was more involvement on the part of the parent. More than one teacher wished that it were mandated by law that parents see their child's teacher a certain number of times per year:

> If it was up to me I believe that . . . it would be mandatory that a parent comes to the school at least once a month to meet with the teacher. That would be the kind of support where you could start getting more and more involved. But I don't believe that we can force any body to do anything in our society.

Teachers wanted parents to be more involved in their children's lives, to know what they were doing in school, to know who their friends were, what their interests were. When they spoke of more involvement, they meant at the broadest level of more active and concerned parenting, which they believed would translate to more involvement in the child's education and schooling.

Not surprisingly, they also wanted parents to be more active in their involvement in the school. Teachers did not want parents to wait for them to initiate but rather to take the first step to initiate contact, to offer their help and support, to ask questions that were on their mind, to let the teacher know when something was bothering them or their child, to be a proactive part of the child's life and education. Several teachers also specifically mentioned a desire for more father involvement in the schools.

The third area for improvement according to the teachers was in the parents having a more positive attitude towards them. In general teachers felt that parents were very mistrustful and suspicious of them and not particularly appreciative of their efforts on behalf of their children. Teachers complained that parents did not really understand that the teacher's role was to address the needs of all of the children in the class, not just their particular child. Some parents were perceived as pushy and demanding and attempting to maximize the teacher's attention to their child at the expense of the rest of the class. Many teachers mentioned wanting parents to say thank you and to indicate that their time and effort and interest in their children was noted and appreciated. Teachers felt that parents sometimes forgot that teachers were human beings who had feelings, who sometimes made mistakes. Several teachers commented that parents need to remember that teachers have feelings, make mistakes, are normal, and forget things sometimes. As one teacher said, "That I'm a person." The issue of trust was particularly powerful for many teachers who perceived parents as attacking whenever they felt an injustice had occurred to their child. Teachers resented and felt demoralized that parents always believed their children to be right without discussing the issue with the teacher. Teachers were particularly bitter when parents went to the principal or school board to complain about a teacher without first discussing the matter with them. Teachers wanted parents to recognize that their children might stretch the truth and that parents need to calmly raise the issue with the teacher before attacking. Teachers did not want parents assuming that they had wronged their child; they want the opportunity to have their side of the story heard. It saddened them that parents would assume the worst of them as it pointed out a fundamental lack of trust and good will between homes and schools.

Many teachers also wished to be treated as a professional, someone who had been trained and knew what she was doing. Teachers lamented that parents seemed to feel they had the right to question (and perhaps even undermine) the teacher's curricular choices and teaching techniques. They felt that teaching was the only profession where the lay person felt they had the right to question their authority:

> I would like the parents to show respect to the profession, to our profession. We all grew up in a time period where, you know, what the teacher said was right. The kids knew

> that if they got in trouble that they also had to be accountable at home and we don't see a lot of that. We're pretty low on the totem pole.

A fourth wish was for parents to be more receptive to hearing about problems their child might be having and be more willing to follow through to address them. Teachers wanted to be able to openly discuss problem areas with parents without being attacked or ridiculed. Moreover, they wanted to see some action taken to remedy the problem. If the child needed extra help with a certain subject area, they wanted the parent to provide assistance to the child to help the child improve his/her skills. If the child was having an adjustment, behavioral, or attitude problem, teachers wanted the parents to back the teacher up and to let the child know that they have to shape up. The teachers did not want to be in it alone. They said over and over in the focus groups, "We cannot do it alone. We need the help and assistance and support of the parents."

Following through on addressing problems was also an area where they wanted assistance and support from the home. The teachers complained that if the child knew there were no consequences to his or her bad behavior, then their would be no improvement, making it harder for the child to get an education and harder for the teacher to teach the rest of the class. Teachers knew that a child who was falling behind needed help outside of school to catch up. If the home did not provide that assistance the child might never catch up. The teachers saw parent involvement in this area as critical:

> I would like to see the parents not being so negative when you tell them about their child, because they must realize that the child has a problem, that you being negative about it and getting angry with the instructor about situations is not going to help the child. It's only going to make things worse. And to acknowledge that there is a problem, that there is something wrong that needs to be corrected, and try to work on those things and not just take them and shove them under the rug as if they were not there, because they are there, and they are problems in a lot of cases.

> . . . you know, if your child has a problem, it is better that you address it and even go through all the areas, "Well maybe he does have a problem let's test him and find out". To accept. And if he does have a problem to go ahead and just deal with it . . . blame shouldn't be put on anyone. The focus should be on the solution.

> One thing I would like to see changed that once you speak to parents that you see some results in their children, be it educationally or behaviorally. Sometimes the children are doing fine academically, but they have some behavior problems and you would like your conversation to lead to some sort of change. That is one of the major things. . . I would like to see that it is worth picking up the phone and calling Mr. so and so because I know I will see results. But it is kind of discouraging to bring a parent in and they are all into your conversation with a whole lot of verbalization and the next day. . . it appears that we never spoke to the parents at all.

> You need follow-up. You need follow-through. Not just the teachers but the parents to follow through with what they say. And a follow through that is all year long. Sometimes you will get it for maybe a few days or a week. This kid has really turned around and then results start drifting off again. And you can see a pattern like in your grade book. I will have little check marks when the homework comes in and towards the end of the report period empty spaces and after you've seen a parent, check marks then the empty spaces start a little bit and then it just goes to where there is nothing.

Conclusion

Teachers have had surprisingly little input into the national debate on parental involvement. There have been few opportunities for teachers to meaningfully express their beliefs and share their opinions and ideas about this issue. Policies, programs, and practices have been developed based on others' ideas of what teachers want and what they need. The teachers who participated in these 14 focus groups had strong feelings about the topic of parent involvement. They shared instances when parental involvement was a positive experience, and when it was frustrating and disappointing. Teachers appreciated parents who followed through on academic and discipline decisions and parents who trusted and respected them as professionals who had children's best interest at heart. Teachers also had experiences with parents whom they perceived as not caring about their children's education and not open to hearing criticisms and suggestions. In all cases, parent involvement required time and effort on the part of the teacher to make phone calls, write notes home, and work with parents who volunteered in the classroom – over and above their many teaching obligations. Parent involvement was not built into their regular teaching routine.

These teacher focus groups provide a first glimpse into what teachers are really thinking and feeling, and the results offered fruitful avenues for refining practice to be more in line with the realities of teachers' jobs.

Recommendations

Based on the focus group discussions, the following recommendations are offered as ways that schools can respond to the concerns raised by the teachers.

1. *Create time and support for teacher efforts in involve parents.*

   Many teachers do not have time set aside in their daily routine for involving parents. Teachers who find it useful to write notes and letters and make phone calls to parents often do so on their own time in the evening. Many teachers would make use of time during the school day for such parent involvement activities.

2. *Provide ongoing professional support and training for teachers in their work with parents and families.*

   Few teachers receive training in their professional educations on how to create effective school-home partnerships. Therefore, they may need in-service training on working with families in order for parent involvement to be effective.

3. *Examine school policies that may be acting as barriers to parent involvement.*

   Each school should form a team comprised of parents and teachers to discuss existing barriers to parent involvement. Teams need to ask themselves such questions as: Are parents made to feel welcome in the school? Do teachers feel comfortable having parents in their classroom? Are there clear and meaningful opportunities for parent involvement? Are there language and cultural barriers that need to be addressed? Do some parents need transportation and child care in order to be involved?

4. *Create more opportunities for teachers to be able to communicate with parents.*

   Most teachers do not see parents except twice a year at parent-teacher conferences. Many teachers would like more opportunities for contact and to develop rapport with the parents of their students so that if a problem arose they would have a foundation for handling the situation together. Schools should examine ways to increase opportunities for parents and teachers to communicate (for example, teachers attending PTA meetings, teachers attending open houses and social events for parents at the school, parents being invited to spend a day in their child's class, etc.)

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[1] These comments are consistent with those reported by Pryor (1994).

The Peabody Family Involvement Initiative: Preparing Preservice Teachers for Family/School Collaboration

Laurie Katz and Jerold P. Bauch

The first open house for parents was scheduled for September 15, and new teacher Lela Martin was nervous. Just having enough time to get her classroom under control, she was faced with a new and uncertain situation. When parents started asking her questions like:

- "When will he start reading?"
- "Are you married? Have any kids?"
- "What's wrong with phonics anyway?"
- "May I see your gradebook?"

Ms. Martin was unprepared. With no classes about parent involvement and no training in handling difficult questions, she struggled through the evening. On her way home, she wondered why her undergraduate program had ignored this critical part of her professional role.

Most new teachers are surprised to find that interacting with parents is a tense and often frightening experience if they are not prepared. Their perceptions of parent involvement may be shaped by these early contacts, and often influence their attitudes toward parent involvement for the rest of their career.

The joint supportive roles of the home and the school have been recognized since the beginning of schooling. Families shape the critical first few years of the child's life and influence all aspects of their development. Schools, through teachers, have the designated responsibility for educating the children. They also have the obligation for building partnerships

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with the families so that the education process is optimized. The need for school/home communication is fairly constant over time, but how parents and teachers interact is influenced by the circumstances of the time. Changes in the school/home relationship arise from changes in society and in our notions of schooling. Among the influential factors that shape the current situation are the rapid changes in family structure, parental roles, and economic demands (Perry & Tannenbaum, 1992). On the school side, the movement toward bureaucratic school management, larger schools, and the professionalization of teachers all seem to play a part. These forces and movements have produced a frustrating irony; everyone recognizes the need for better parent involvement (Elam, Rose & Gallup, 1993), but not much changes from year to year (Decker, Gregg & Decker, 1994). In this paper we look at the initial preparation of teachers to engage families in these partnerships. Our focus comes from our belief that teachers rarely do well in what they are not well-prepared to do. Our presentation will survey the preparedness of the current teaching force, analyze results from an evaluation of one college's efforts to improve teacher education, and suggest ways to expand and improve parent involvement through preservice teacher preparation programs.

Opportunity Lost

If there are gaps between family influence on development and what the schools are trying to do, there are lost opportunities to maximize the educational success for the child (Riley, 1997; Bradley, 1997). If parents are not aware of what teachers expect from students, they are not likely to reinforce or extend the school objectives at home and in the community. When teachers are unaware of home or community characteristics, they cannot capitalize on the out-of-school experience to energize the school curriculum. When teachers and parents miscommunicate it is often the student that has to interpret or even mediate the differences. At the most extreme, parents and teachers may find themselves at cross purposes if they do not have frequent communication.

The literature is replete with cries for expanding and improving parent involvement in children's education, and virtually everyone recognizes the importance of synergy between families and teachers (Henderson & Berla, 1995). Some even estimate that the out-of-school variables of the home and community are more powerful predictors of student success than the in-school variables of curriculum and instruction (e.g., Coleman, et. al., 1966; Mosteller & Moynihan, 1972). The parents themselves recognize the gaps, fully seventy percent think they and other parents should be "more involved" (Farkas, et al., 1999). It falls to the teacher to either compensate for an absence of support from student homes or to initiate strategies that will improve the interaction between home and classroom. This does not seem to be an unreasonable professional expectation. But when you look at the preparation of teachers, you find that the vast majority of teachers in todays' classrooms *have little or no preparation in parent or community involvement* (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Imig, 1995).

The Gap in Teacher Preparation

The benchmark study of teacher education for parent involvement was conducted by Chavkin and Williams (1988). They surveyed teacher educators in six Southern and Southwestern states and found only 4% taught a complete course about parent involvement to preservice teachers. Of these teacher educators, 82.8% thought such a course should be required. A 1992 survey by Young and Hite (cited in Stamp & Groves, 1994) confirmed this very low rate of course offerings on family involvement. They searched 973 teacher preparation programs and found that there were very few that fully prepared teachers to work with families. With such a small percentage of professors teaching and colleges offering a course, we can infer that an equally small percentage of graduating teachers had any preparation to engage families in their children's education.

The requirements for teacher education also reflect low interest and low expectations. Since teacher education licensure is controlled by each state, the requirements of content and emphasis must be examined state by state. In 1994, when the Minnesota Center for Social Change surveyed state parent involvement training requirements, they found that only three states (Iowa, Minnesota and Virginia) required coursework in parent involvement for elementary teachers. No states had this requirement for secondary teachers (Richardson, 1994). In the Harvard study of teacher education, Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, & Lopez (1997) reviewed the 1992 requirements for all fifty states and the District of Columbia. Many of the requirement statements did not even mention phrases like "parent and community involvement". Those states that had some expectation for training in this area were almost all focused on the elementary level. The authors of this comprehensive national study concluded that preparing teachers for family involvement was not a high priority, and was lagging behind other reform movements and school practice.

Parent involvement was also virtually absent in the teacher certification exams. Greenwood & Hankins (1989) found that only 1.94% of the 826 competencies measured by tests such as the National Teachers Exam dealt with "extra-classroom influences" including parent involvement.

Pipho (1997) reported on the assessment of teacher training in parent involvement by the Center for School Change at the University of Minnesota. The survey of licensure requirements in the 50 states concluded that not many states require teachers (or administrators) to study parent involvement or to develop skills that will promote parent partnerships. Less than one third of the states had any stated requirements, and many of these were vague or unfocused. Radcliffe, Malone, and Nathan (1994) summarized the status of teacher preparation in parent involvement, stating: "Teachers and school personnel report that they have received little training on ways to help parents get more involved in their child's education" (p. 148).

In the mid-1990s, there was a hint that the teacher preparation situation may be changing. Young and Hite (1994) conducted a national study and found:

- one-fifth of teacher education institutions still offered no parent involvement preparation;
- a few colleges "include some parent involvement content" in five or more courses;
- 79.1% of teacher education programs "offer one or more courses that include content dealing with parent involvement" (p. 157).

These results must be viewed carefully, since "including some parent involvement content" is not clearly defined. *Offering* a course is not the same as making parent involvement training a requirement for all prospective teachers. Survey results like these from the colleges themselves often reflect an overly-optimistic view of the preparation program. At many universities, the drive to add an academic major to undergraduate professional education for teachers has either reduced the availability of parent involvement courses or prevented the addition of requirements to an already full curriculum. Taken together, only a small percentage of currently practicing teachers had even minimal preparation to work effectively with student families over the past thirty years, and the nation's teaching force entered the profession quite unprepared. Stamp and Groves (1994) said the effect of this situation is that teachers " . . . may feel that they are left to their own devices when it comes to working with parents and, consequently, may feel that what they know was learned at the expense of mistakes and miscalculation." (p. 6). Teachers and administrators recognize the absence of training. In their six-year study conducted in southwestern states, Chavkin and Williams (1988) reported that 86.6% of 575 teachers said they needed more undergraduate training on parent involvement. Becker and Epstein (1982) also reported that teachers perceive themselves as being poorly prepared to engage parents in the education of their children. Scales found that about half of a random sample of 439 teachers thought that their preparation in parent involvement was inadequate (Gursky, 1991). The National Center for Education Statistics reported a similar finding: 48% of teachers in a national sample from 900 schools cited the absence of training as the second most influential barrier to better parent involvement (Burns, 1998).

The absence of initial training and experience working with parents is connected to what teachers do to involve families in their schools. The landmark studies by Epstein (1983) and Becker and Epstein (1982) established the following relationships:

- Teachers who involve parents are much less likely to form negative stereotypes about parents and families.
- The more often teachers interact with parents, the more positive are their attitudes about parent involvement and listening to parent input.
- Teachers who learned the values of parent involvement were more likely to overcome barriers and obstacles to school/home interaction.

These relationships were originally conceptualized in the Rand *Change Agent* studies (Berman & McLaughlin, 1977) as *teacher efficacy*. In these studies, efficacy was found to be the most powerful variable in predicting the success of program implementation.

More recently, Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler and Brissie (1987) pursued the topic of *efficacy* applied to parent involvement. They concluded that teachers who had gained confidence and skills in parent involvement were more likely to engage in parent involvement activities. It follows that teachers who have not had knowledge and skill training during their teacher preparation are likely to have low confidence (efficacy) and therefore are less likely to initiate positive parent relationships.

After teachers begin their professional service, support for their parent involvement activities does not get much better (Brand, 1996). Secretary of Education Richard Riley noted: "Schools and school systems seldom offer staff any formal training in collaborating with parents or in understanding the varieties of modern family life" (Riley, 1994). Moles (1993) said that: "This lack of initial training is not compensated by inservice training except in the rare school district, so most teachers must rely on their accumulated experience in dealing with parents" (p. 32). It is no wonder that 90% of teachers believe that lack of parent support is a big problem in their schools (Olson, 1988). Unprepared teachers are unlikely to positively engage parents and build the relationships between school and home. Shimoni (1991) argued that the specialized knowledge and skills of parent involvement are particularly needed by early childhood education professionals – those teachers who influence children and families early. There is little question that teachers should be prepared to work effectively with families, and that the preparation ought to be part of their preservice teacher education.

The Peabody Family Involvement Initiative

For more than ten years, Peabody College of Vanderbilt University has had a "parent involvement" course as a required part of the undergraduate teacher education program. The course ("Parents and their Developing Children") is required for all students seeking certification in early childhood education (pre-k through grade three) and often elected by elementary and some secondary education majors. The three-semester hour course is consistent with current recommendations to prepare teachers for family involvement. The course was routinely taught by both of the investigators in the study, accompanied by frequent joint planning and occasional team teaching.

Conceptual framework of the program

The following themes were emphasized throughout the PFII:

- All families are unique and to be respected.
- All families have strengths.
- The family is the child's first and most important teacher.
- Family/school collaboration is important in maximizing a child's potential.
- Family involvement includes activities both at school and home.
- Family/school activities are effective when they strengthen the relationships between the child and family as well as address the teacher's needs.

The Peabody Family Involvement Initiative (PFII) involved three major components: 1) general knowledge, 2) skills, and 3) authentic "real life" settings. These components were based on themes that addressed families, family-school collaboration, and developmental issues of children in their preschool and early elementary years. Themes pertaining to families include every family as unique, having strengths, and respected as being their child's first teacher. The concept of "family" is presented as constituting many different structures (e.g., two-parent, single, blended, divorced, adoptive) with the child's primary caregiver being a parent, sibling, relative, friend, foster parent, etc. Each family is perceived as having their own shared values, priorities, roles and relationships in raising children; that is, their own culture. Culture is defined according to Goodenough (1981), a cultural anthropologist, as "shared expectations of standards people hold for perceiving, believing, acting, evaluating and communicating". Our program operates from a "cultural competence" approach that views the school as an inclusive, respectful setting where diversity is welcomed. A family systems theory is presented to help prospective teachers better understand the roles and relationships within a family unit and how the impact of the school environment affects families in different ways. An ecological systems framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) is used to organize the complexity of biological, psychological, social, cultural, and economic information to better understand how forces of the environment besides the family directly or indirectly influence a child's growth. By perceiving each child's family as an individual unit and part of a larger system, family involvement is discussed as activities both inside and outside of the classroom that build on family strengths and foster collaboration with the school.

In the Peabody Family Involvement Initiative, these themes are first addressed in a one-semester university course called "Parents and their Developing Children." This class is most often taken by students during their sophomore or junior year. During the course, family/school collaboration strategies are taught that are representative of Epstein's six family involvement categories. According to Epstein, schools have a responsibility to:

1. provide families the skills and knowledge needed to help their children at each age level;
2. communicate with families through notes, telephone calls, conferences, and other types of communication;
3. include parents as volunteers and assistants in the classrooms and other areas of school;
4. guide parents so they can "assist their own children" through monitoring, discussing, and helping with homework;
5. involve parents in decision making; and
6. draw on community resources, social agencies, health services, and businesses, and provide programs that give children and families the support that they need.

These Epstein "typologies" (Decker, Gregg, & Decker, 1996) have become widely-used frameworks for studying parent involvement, and are also the sources of the PTA's National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs (National PTA, 1997). One of the goals of PFII is to prepare preservice teachers to work in a wide range of schools so they can effectively implement traditional family involvement approaches that are common in many schools as well as use new and innovative approaches occurring less often. Some of these strategies were taught by course assignments, lectures, and exercises. Two examples of traditional strategies are role playing parent/teacher conferences and developing class newsletters. Examples of more innovative strategies are using electronic voice mail and interviewing families in their homes.

The third component involves a "theory into practice" approach where preservice teachers have an opportunity through course assignments and student teaching placements to implement some of the concepts and strategies they were taught in the course into "real-life" situations. We developed a list of approximately 14 family/school activities in conjunction with the Coordinator of Student Teaching, which became part of the expectations for the student teaching experience. This list was developed from the themes of PFII. Preservice teachers selected or adapted activities from this list and implemented them during their 15 weeks of classroom placements. These activities were supervised by Peabody's teacher education program and the cooperating teachers at their assigned schools. The "practice" component allows students to translate the content learned in the course to the reality of the classroom situation. Incidentally, we also found that student teachers tried out some practices that were not regular routines of their placement school or cooperating teacher.

The Present Study

Purpose

In 1998, we decided to examine several questions about the PFII and to evaluate program effects as teachers left the university and became teachers. The main purpose was to gain a better understanding of how students felt about family involvement and what activities they used after completing the PFII experience. It was our intention to study the immediate effects of PFII as students ended the course, follow-up with student teachers, and also gather data from teachers in the field.

Research Questions

To better understand how students felt and what activities they used after completing the PFII experience, we pursued the following question areas:

1. What are the attitudes about parent involvement activities of teacher education students and graduates after completing a parent-involvement training program (PFII)?

2. Which strategies and approaches did student teachers and classroom teachers think are important and feasible?
3. Which strategies and approaches did classroom teachers actually use in their schools?
4. Were there differences in the parent involvement attitudes and practices between subjects who completed the PFII and those who had no specific training?

PFII Survey Development

We developed survey instruments (based on earlier studies) that assessed teacher attitudes and parent involvement strategies. Many of the survey constructs were originally derived from Epstein's typologies of parent involvement by Gifford (1991). The "efficacy" elements originated with Gibson (Gibson & Dembo, 1984) and Ashton (Ashton & Webb, 1986). Gifford used data from her survey to assess the effects of student teaching on the attitudes of the student teachers in a college setting where there was no coursework on parent involvement. While Gifford found "no significant differences" in attitudes before and after student teaching, she noted a trend toward less positive attitudes after completing student teaching. This is not surprising in view of the lack of preservice coursework, training and practice. Unprepared student teachers faced the same situation that unprepared first-year teachers experience; uncertainty, confusion, anxiety and the beginnings of negative attitudes about parent and family involvement.

In another study of parent involvement attitudes of preservice teachers, Tichenor (1995) developed a Likert-type instrument that was adapted from one developed by McBride (1991). In the Tichenor study, the subjects at two universities took a parent involvement course before student teaching. She found that they had generally positive attitudes about the Epstein categories, but that the group did not feel well prepared to conduct parent involvement activities during student teaching. A comparison group of student teachers who did not take a course felt even less prepared. Foster and Loven (1992) also used a Likert-type questionnaire and the efficacy construct to evaluate the beliefs and perspectives about parent involvement of undergraduate students at Memphis State University.

Two different versions of the survey were designed to sample the different experiences of preservice and inservice teachers. The first form addressed nine general family involvement activities that were consistent with Epstein's model, the skill/content/practice construct promoted by the U.S. Department of Education, the content of the course, and studies regarding the types of activities being implemented in the schools

(Bauch, 1994). These activities were:

1. introductory activities
2. written communications
3. telephone calls
4. volunteers
5. meeting with parents who have children with special needs
6. home visits
7. recorded messages
8. decision-making meetings
9. parent/teacher conferences.

Each type of family involvement activity had two corresponding categories in a Likert scale response. The first category addressed the teacher's attitude and perceived feasibility in implementing this activity. The second corresponding category addressed their preparation towards implementing the activity. Likert-like scales have typically been used to sample these concepts (Guskey & Passaro, 1992). The first and second groups of preservice teachers received this survey with the only difference being the cover letter acknowledging their roles as students completing the course "Parents and their Developing Children" or student teachers completing their classroom placements.

The third group, the inservice teachers, received a modified survey. The main differences between the two surveys focused on the inservice teachers *implementation* of these identified parent/school activities. For example, all three groups were asked to respond to the family involvement activity of involving family members as volunteers in the classroom. Groups one and two were asked to respond to the importance and feasibility of this activity. Group three was asked to provide information about their use of the strategy, noting how many families were involved as volunteers in the classroom and in what capacity.

The survey was piloted with both preservice and inservice teachers. Interviews were held with each of the participants after they completed the survey. We used pilot tests to obtain feedback regarding duplication of content among the questions and unclear or incomplete directions. We were also interested in the participants' written comments. The revised version included ample space to elaborate on their preparedness and reasons for the extent of their implementing specific strategies.

Sample

Three groups of preservice and inservice teachers were asked to complete surveys during the 1997-1998 school year. The first group included students who had just completed the course "Parents and their Developing Children." These sixty-seven students were primarily undergraduates receiving certification in either early childhood or elementary education. Some were receiving dual certification in early childhood or elementary education as well as special education. Other students who took the course were majors in Child Development, Special Education or Human Organization & Development.

The second group of sixty-six students was composed of prospective teachers who were completing 15 weeks in classroom placements as "student teachers". All of these students had completed a parent/school collaboration course. The third group consisted of teachers who had graduated and received teaching certification from Peabody College within the last three years. Members of this group had teaching experience from one - three years. About 210 surveys were mailed to the practicing teachers with sixty-nine (33%) returned. Of the returned surveys, thirty-three teachers had taken the course "Parents and their Developing Children." Eight had taken another type of parent course as part of their special education training. Data from this small group were not included unless their responses added significantly to the overall results.

Limitations of the Study

A few of the students who took the course were not preparing to be teachers. We included their responses because they completed the same requirements and experiences as the teacher preparation group. Their responses were not dissimilar from the other students in the course.

A second limitation was in the limited opportunity to influence prospective teachers toward excellent family involvement. We offered one course plus application during student teaching. The Harvard Family Research Project on preparing teachers to work with families suggested that training should be taught on a gradual basis, through a number of methods, and spread throughout the teacher education curricula (Shartrand, et al., 1997). They point out that one course is not enough, especially when family involvement content is not integrated in other courses on related subjects. A third limitation was the measurement strategy. Survey instruments reflect the self-perceptions of the respondent and are difficult to verify or validate.

Results

The results of this survey are organized under three themes: preparation, activity types, and family participation. This grouping reflects the sequence of events for participants in the study; undergraduate preparation for parent involvement, activities selected by teachers and the number of families engaged in these acitivites.

Preservice Preparation Results

Sixty-seven undergraduate students who had just taken the course "Parents and their Developing Children" completed the survey. In addition, sixty-six preservice teachers who had just completed their student teaching placement completed a similar survey.

Scores are reported according to the preservice teachers' responses on the Likert scale from one to four: one being *strongly disagree* and four being *strongly agree*. Both groups of preservice teachers thought all nine of the parent involvement activities were important. Ninety-four percent of their responses were either three or four. The lowest items for students who took the course were eighty-four percent agree/strongly agree for *unscheduled parent/teacher conferences* and eighty-two percent for making *phone calls* to parents. The lowest scores for the student teachers were for the *home visit* activity (seventy-five percent), *recorded messages* (eighty-two percent), and *unscheduled meetings* (eighty-five percent).

Table 1: Preservice teachers' feasibility ratings by activity

Both groups of preservice teachers demonstrated a slight variability in their ratings of feasibility for implementing certain family involvement activities. Table 1 shows the way the activities were ranked by undergraduates and student teachers.

Type of activity	Preservice UG	Student teachers
Introductory activities	97%	94%
Written communications	96%	97%
Meetings with parents of children with special needs	97%	93%
Scheduled parent/teacher conferences	98%	99%
Recorded hotline messages	94%	79%
Phone calls to parents	86%	74%
Volunteers	88%	86%
Committees	84%	84%
Home visits	65%	38%

The ratings with the most variability between preservice undergraduates and student teachers were in their perceptions of their *preparedness*.

Students who had just completed the course thought they were most prepared to implement introductory activities, written communication, recorded messages, volunteers, and parent/teacher conferences. They felt less prepared to make phone calls, participate in committees, home visits, and special needs meetings. Few of the preservice students checked "No preparation" for any of the parent involvement activities. Student teachers rated themselves "very prepared" at the same or at a higher percentage than the students who had just completed the course on introductory activities, written communications, phone calls, and special education meetings.

Feasibility and Preparation Summary

Preservice teachers thought all the parent involvement activities were important. Their perceptions of feasibility varied. Students considered themselves most prepared for introductory activities, written communication, recorded messages, volunteers, and parent/teacher conference. All nine activities were addressed in the class, but these specific activities were given more emphasis. In spite of special attention in the course, students still thought they needed more training in all of the activities. Their perceived need for more training could be due to the need for a better understanding of a teacher's role and the reality of the school setting. Discrepancies in perceptions among student teachers could result from variety in their student teaching settings. Some classroom teachers may do more and expect more parent involvement activities than others. For example, only five student teachers went on a home visit during their student teaching placement. Student teacher anecdotal remarks regarding the feasibility of home visits focused on barriers to implementation, such as "considered too time consuming" and "can be hazardous in certain areas. I've heard many a horror story."

Types of Parent Involvement Activities by Certified Teachers

The types of parent involvement activities have been categorized in several different ways (Bauch, 1994). The Epstein "typologies" are the most popular, and influenced how the course was designed in this study. What teachers do to engage parents is influenced by their initial training (or lack of preparation) and the activities that are present in the schools where teachers work. If a teacher is well prepared to interact with parents at an "open house" event and the school does not have open house meetings, the teacher might report high preparation but low use of this activity. If the class does not emphasize meeting with parents of children with special needs and the school requires teachers to attend all IEP and other "staffing" meetings, the teacher may feel rather unprepared and report that they often do this activity.

In the present study we organized teacher responses under the activities and separated by whether they took the parent involvement course or had no course. The percentage of each group that used the most popular activities is shown in Table 2:

Table 2. Teachers' use of activity types

Activity type	Took course	No course
Introductory activities	81%	72%
Written notes	73%	77%
Telephone calls	97%	96%
Special education meetings	79%	85%
Parent/teacher conference	88%	85%
Volunteers	63%	42%
Decision & advisory committees	49%	46%
Recorded messages	42%	27%
Home visits	12%	6%

Preparation

All the practicing teachers who took the course "Parents and their Developing Children" stated they were "very prepared" more often than the teachers who didn't take the course in all of the nine parent involvement activities sampled. Graph #1 shows the difference between the two groups: sixty-nine percent of the people who took the course said they were "well prepared" and only thirty percent of the non-course takers reported that they felt well prepared. Preparation for home visits was the one exception, where neither group felt well prepared.

When asked if they "need more preparation" to engage in parent involvement activities, both course-takers and non-course-takers stated that they needed more training. Teachers who did not take the course responded most often to "need more training" or "no preparation". Seventy-three percent of the teachers with no course felt that they need more preparation; sixty percent of the teachers who had the course felt this same lack of preparation. There was one inconsistent finding about preparation. For home visits and decision/advisory committee activities, none of the teachers who did not take the course reported that they needed more training. Only one teacher responded that s/he was "very prepared" to conduct home visits and participate in committees. The other teachers reported "no preparation."

Over half of the teachers who took the course stated they needed "more training" in meetings with families who had children with special needs. Anecdotal comments referred to the need for more training in this activity specifically in the referral and prereferral process. Other anectodal remarks from the surveys highlight how the course helped prepare these teachers to implement parent involvement activities:

"I have referred back to my notes often especially during conference times."

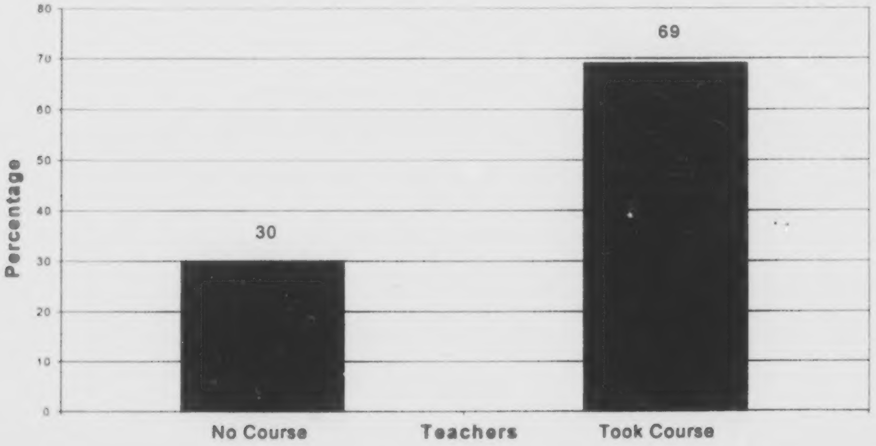
"I felt very prepared for these (parent/teacher conferences). I still remember the clues and role playing from the class. They helped me to prepare."

"This class was one of my favorite courses because it was so practical and thorough. I have definitely put the information I learned to active use. The handouts are still in my file and I also refer to my Parent Involvement Report . . ."

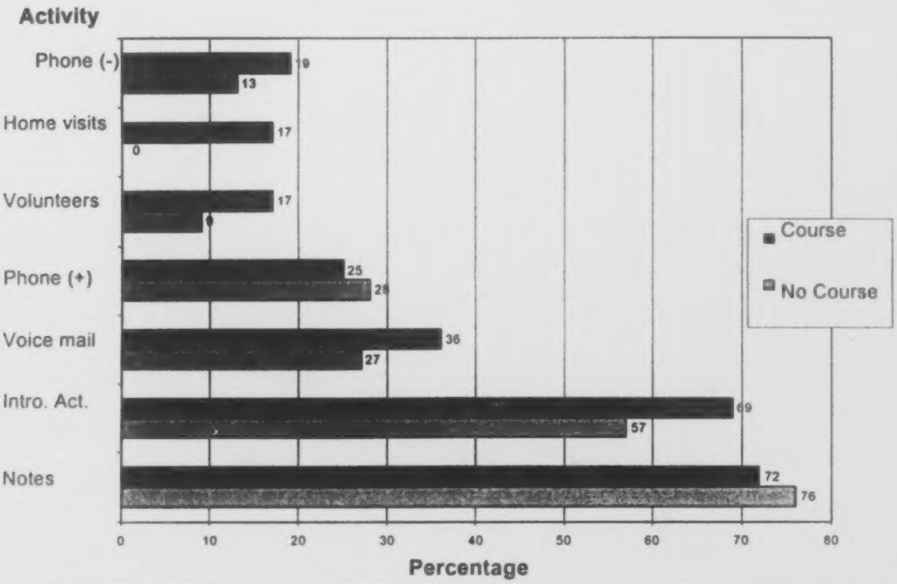
Family Participation

Teachers were also asked about the number of families in their child's classroom that were involved in a specific parent involvement activity. This information was elicited for all of the nine activities except for meetings regarding students who have special needs and participation in decision making meetings. Graph 2 shows the percentage of teachers reporting that they reached "most or all" families by activity types, comparing data for teachers who completed a parent involvement course and those with no course.

Graph 1: Well prepared in nine parent involvement activities



Graph 2: Most or all families involved in parent involvement activities



In home visits, of the 6 teachers who took the course 83% (5) reached few families and 17% (1) reached all of the families. The 4 teachers who didn't take the course but were engaging in home visits all were reaching few or less than half of the families. It is interesting to note that the small number of teachers who took a "families" course through the Department of Special Education conducted more home visits and reached more families than other respondents. Historically, home visits have been considered a more acceptable strategy in early intervention and early childhood/special education. Teachers who made phone calls were asked to respond to the number of phone calls they made regarding positive news about their child and about student problems. Teachers who took the course reached 25% of their families (most or all) with positive news whereas teachers who didn't take the course reached 28% of the families (most or all). Ten percent of the teachers who took the course called most of their families about student problems; 13% who didn't take the course called families called about student problems. Neither groups called all of their families about student problems. One explanation of the similar responses by both groups of teachers is the ambivalence teachers noted about dealing with negative issues in general. Many anecdotal remarks focused on apprehension to face-to-face interaction with parents and "being nervous about approaching negative issues."

The other parent involvement activities used less often by the teachers were those that only some schools have instituted such as recorded messages or home visits. Recorded messages depends on the availibility of voice messaging technology and is rarely the decision of an individual teacher. Home visits are infrequently used as school-wide strategies, and may depend on the level of interest and committment of individual teachers.

In addition, teachers may engage in other activities that are up to the discretion of the individual teachers as to their implementation such as "parents as volunteers". Teachers may engage in routine activities due to school policy or tradition but they may initiate parent volunteer activities to a greater extent (reaching more families) when they are more prepared to do so (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995.) Teachers who took the course reached more families for introductory activities, voice mail, and volunteers than those who did not take the course.

Summary

Preparation of preservice teachers for parent involvement activities can have an influence on how they feel about parent involvement and what they do as practicing classroom teachers. Our study concluded that the parent involvement activities teachers most engaged in were introductory home/school activities, written progress notes to families, calling family members by phone, participating in a meeting with a parent who has a child with special needs, and conducting parent teacher conferences. These are activities that are traditionally part of many school programs and policies. In fact, teachers are likely to engage in the parent involvement activities that are valued or expected in the local school culture (Brand, 1996). For example, if the school sets a high priority on family literacy, it is likely that teachers would report being engaged in these activities *regardless of their preservice preparation.* The other parent involvement activities less often selected by the teachers were those that only some schools have instituted such as recorded messages or home visits. Even though we emphasized these topics in the course, individual teachers are not likely to start innovative practices in schools where those practices do not exist (or where special technology or policies are absent).

On the other hand, teachers may engage in activities that are up to the discretion of the individual teachers as to their implementation such as "parents as volunteers". Teachers may engage in activities due to policy but they may engage in an activity to a greater extent (reaching more families) when they are more prepared to do so. Teachers who implement activities that are not part of regular school programs may reach a higher number of families due to their preparation for specific activities. Teachers who took the course actually reached more families in their classes than teachers who did not take the course for introductory activities, voice mail, and volunteers.

Teachers who took the course reported at a higher rate than teachers who did not take the course that they were more prepared to implement parent involvement activities. However, teachers who took the course still stated that they needed more preparation. This response indicates that a one semester course is insufficient to prepare teachers for parent involvement activities and that ongoing inservice training may be pertinent to meeting these needs.

Implications for Practice

We found that a fairly traditional plan (one course plus student teaching practice) had a positive effect on the way teacher education students perceive and value family involvement in childrens' education. This element of the undergraduate teacher education program also carried over into teaching practice, where teachers who were involved in PFII reported that they were using many of the strategies in their schools. This seems to show that many other teacher education programs could follow this pattern without major revision of their curricula. While it might require the addition of one more required course, the value of preparing teachers to work with families far outweighs the inconvenience of a minor change in teacher education programs. Another minor change that could be done in any teacher education program is the selection of student teaching placements according to the kind and level of parent involvement present in those classrooms. The formal expectations for student teaching (often written in a "student teacher handbook") should specify a number of parent involvement activities that the student should practice while in the field.

A more comprehensive approach was suggested by Foster and Loven, where they recommended:

- include more parent involvement preparation systematically throughout the teacher education program;
- placing students in field experiences where they can interact with families of varying socioeconomic levels and ethnic backgrounds;
- engage students in practice of parent communication strategies during their undergraduate program; and
- plan additional training and support related to parent involvement for teachers during their first few years in the profession (Foster & Loven, 1992).

We agree with these recommendations and believe that a more systematic and integrated approach to parent involvement preparation would further improve the performance of beginning teachers. The challenge of working effectively with the parents of their students is serious, and beginning teachers deserve to be fully equipped to build partnerships with families.

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Parents' Educational Beliefs: Implications for Parent Participation in School Reforms

Lee Shumow

The purpose of this study is to explore parents' ideas about basic issues underlying current constructivist school reforms. Recently, educational policy makers, researchers, and practitioners have supported numerous educational reforms. One proposed reform, aimed at facilitating student achievement through building relationships between homes and schools, is the inclusion of parents as partners in education (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). Little is known, however, about parents beliefs about their inclusion or about the basis on which parents make decisions regarding educational issues. It is important to learn more about such parent beliefs at this time in which educators advocate widespread reform of curriculum, instruction, and assessment predicated on constructivist epistemology.

The notion of partnership, so popular in descriptions of current initiatives to involve parents (Comer & Haynes, 1991; Epstein, 1995; Haynes & Ben-Avie, 1996), implies working together toward some purpose. Dewey (1916) explicitly identifies shared goals as a foundation of partnership. Yet, although many professionals are enthusiastic about the reforms described below, educators have recognized that some parents may reject school reforms, rebelling against progressive constructivist educational practices and advocating a return to the traditional practices with which they were familiar (Casanova, 1996; Dillon, 1990; Dow, 1991; Konzal, 1996; Mirel, 1994). Some suggest that schools should acquiesce to parents because of their primacy as stakeholders in children's education (Carr, 1995), whereas others demonstrate that parents may be amenable to accepting reforms after they have learned about them (Matusov & Rogoff,

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1996; Shumow, 1998). Although seemingly disparate, both these views underscore the need for educators to consider the content and basis of parent beliefs about schooling and learning. Both also underscore the importance of establishing intersubjectivity, a working understanding, among professional and parent participants in educational decision-making.

If parents are to be included as partners in education then their views on these issues need to be considered. The idea of including parents as decision-makers in education has been touted as a high level, democratic, and desirable practice (Comer & Haynes, 1991; Epstein, 1995). However, educational systems that currently include parents in decision-making roles actually tend to include relatively few parents who serve as committee or council "representatives" (Carr, 1996; Wells, Kratzer, & Bernal, 1995). The extent to which these parents actually represent other parents is open to question. Recently, several scholars have suggested that parents who participate in decision-making roles are not necessarily representative of all parents. Rather, they tend to come either from the elite of the community (Carr, 1996), with a personal ax to grind (Casanova, 1996), or as a result of being chosen for their cooperativeness by educators who run the committees (Konzal, 1996). In the present investigation, beliefs were sampled from a broad range of parents with the intent of listening to the voices of all parents. I hope to demonstrate the importance of garnering views from a spectrum of parents, as well as understanding the grounds on which parents base their beliefs and the motives that they express for their views.

Despite the observation that proposals for school reform resemble a "gathering babel" (Cohen, 1995), several ideas have gained broad acceptance. For one, many reforms aim to have students construct knowledge with understanding, solve problems, and communicate effectively (Hiebert, et al., 1996; National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 1989). These goals are not new ideas in education, indeed they are similar to those championed by Dewey, but they do differ distinctly from essentialist ideas prevalent in public education since the decline of progressivist ideas earlier in the century (Darling-Hammond, 1996). Another commonality among reforms, which is supported by recent research on learning, is active participation of students in authentic tasks (Brown, 1994; Cognition & Technology Group at Vanderbilt, 1990). Yet another widely shared idea is that of the teacher as a guide of student learning rather than as a transmitter of information solely. A final popular reform examined is authentic assessment (Darling-Hammond, Ancess, & Falk, 1995; Lesh & Lamon, 1992). Understanding parent perspectives on these issues, as well as the manner in which they perceive their own role, may facilitate productive communication and enhance partnership efforts between schools and parents. The present study examines parent beliefs about fundamental issues in schooling addressed by current reforms. These are: (a) the goals of schooling, (b) learning processes, (c) teacher's classroom roles, (d) assessment of children's learning, and (e) parents' roles in education.

Prior research on parent beliefs about schooling indicates, not surprisingly, that parents have a range of ideas about learning and schooling. Cohen (1981) observed that mothers accepted constructivist ideas only while their children were in preschool and that they endorsed traditional views once children entered formal schooling. Goodnow, Cashmore, Cotton, and Knight (1984) found that parent beliefs favoring traditional education remained stable despite a school initiative to inform them about educational expectations consistent with children's cognitive development. On the other hand, Matusov and Rogoff (1996) observed parent practices consonant with constructivist educational philosophy among parents with longer tenure as helpers in an "innovative" elementary school than among parent volunteers who were "newcomers." They concluded that parents gained new ideas as a result of their experiences in the school. With these findings in mind, parents of second graders were included in the present study because their children had made the transition to elementary school identified as important by Cohen (1981).

Method

The study was conducted in two neighboring elementary school classrooms within a Midwestern school district implementing numerous educational reforms. The classroom teachers were recognized as leaders in implementation of reforms. These reforms included whole language, invented spelling, Cognitively Guided Instruction in Mathematics (Fennema & Carpenter, 1989), authentic assessment (student portfolios), and promotion of multiple intelligences. A great deal of political rhetoric against school reform was evident in the community (local newspaper, school board election, and complaints to school principals). Of all the reforms mentioned above, authentic (or outcome-based) assessment was most controversial. A small politically conservative citizens group opposed school reform: they organized, held meetings, wrote letters, and put forth candidates for school board. On the surface, it appeared that the community was fomenting against reforms.

Forty parents were invited to participate in a study examining parent views of learning and schooling (34 parents agreed). Thirty-one parents (6 fathers, 25 mothers) of second grade children completed interviews (3 interviews were not completed because of parent or child illness). Of the six parents who declined, one cited reticence because of problems with

English, three were experiencing extremely stressful life events, one was moving, and one was a foster mother. Parent educational levels ranged from high school to graduate degrees with a median level of some college attendance (attended but did not complete a postsecondary program). Parent occupations ranged from clerical workers to professionals. Parents of primary grade children were selected because they tend to be more involved in schooling and, although they have some experience with the school program, they are less likely to be influenced by a child's educational history than are parents of middle or high school students. As a result of materials sent home or presented at open house by the teacher, all parents had some prior exposure and information about the school program.

Parents responded to a semi-structured interview. All parents were individually interviewed in their homes with the exception of two parents who, at their request, were interviewed in an office at the university. Interview items concerned: (a) the goals of schooling, (b) how children learn, (c) the role of teachers, (d) the needs, skills, and interests of their child, and (e) the role of parents in facilitating children's learning. In addition, parents provided opinions on the value of various sources of assessment (e.g. standardized tests, examining child's actual school work, talking to teachers) in helping them to determine how well their child was learning. Their responses were very (3), somewhat (2), or not (1) helpful. Finally, in order to tap ideas about teaching and learning, parents were asked to nominate a classroom teacher they had known who was an expert at teaching and to explain the basis on which they decided that this particular teacher was expert.

Scholars have suggested that researchers provide parents greater latitude in defining their own ideas (McGuire, 1986; Miller, 1988). Because of an interest in allowing parents to define their own ideas, a content analysis of five interviews was used to generate a coding scheme based on the views parents expressed not on predetermined categories or scales. Interviews were then coded by a research assistant unfamiliar with the children, families, or schools.

The goals of schooling identified by parents were coded as: (a) transmission of basic skills - no higher order thinking mentioned, (b) higher order thinking included, and (c) other. Views of how children learn were coded as: (a) through practice or demonstration, (b) practical experience, (e.g. "hands-on" activities), (c) social interactions such as discussion and exposure to the views of others, and (d) motivational factors. The role of teachers was coded as: (a) transmitting knowledge, (b) providing meaningful and novel experiences, or (c) focusing on individual children. Parents identified their own roles as: (a) providing emotional support, (b) providing enrichment, and (c) drilling. Parents rated the value of authentic (school papers, homework) and comparative assessments such as grades and achievement tests as: (a) very, (b) somewhat, or (c) not valuable. Responses to parent views on teaching expertise were coded as (a) the teacher benefited their individual child, (b) the teacher benefited all children, or (c) other.

Twenty-five percent of the interviews were independently coded by another research assistant unfamiliar with the families for the purpose of the study. Interrater reliability was high (exact agreement = .89). Disagreement between coders was resolved by the author who created the coding scheme.

Results

Parent Beliefs about the Goals of Schooling

Few parents identified goals consistent with those of current reforms. Rather, most (61%) parents identified the traditional goals of transmitting basic skills as the most important purpose of schooling. It was not unusual to hear parents concur with one mother who said "you need your basics covered all the way up through – your reading, spelling, and arithmetic, your phonics." Only 19% of the parents mentioned critical thinking, problem solving, or communication skills as important. One parent who identified the important goals of schooling as "the learning skills, by that I mean reasoning and communication, and the ability to solve problems" was in the minority. In fact, when asked directly about whether teachers could teach thinking skills, more than half (55%) of the parents either disagreed or did not know. Parents usually stated that they did not believe that it was possible to teach thinking because it is an innate process. The remaining 19% of parents mentioned "other" goals such as development of social skills. For example, one parent replied that an educational goal should be ". . . functioning together as a class, I think that forces them to become somewhat of a team . . . it also, I guess, teaches them to be polite."

The reasons parents gave to support their view about what was important to learn in school were within the practical realm. Some parents saw practicality as meaning efficiency. One mother thought that teachers needed to get together and divide up the skills children needed to learn in an orderly manner so that time was not wasted in repeating or reteaching skills across grade levels. Other parents thought practicality meant preparing children for future success, and they believed that children need to learn those essential skills in first grade that will allow them to succeed in second grade. Likewise, some thought that elementary schools needed to prepare children for middle school. Yet others focused on the value of school learning in its applicability to "everyday adult life," such as the ability to balance a checkbook or read instructions. Only a few parents talked about the pursuit of knowledge and the joy associated with learning as reasons to learn in school.

Parent Beliefs about How Children Learn

Although slightly more than one-third (35%) of the parents felt that traditional methods of drill and practice of isolated skills accounted for academic learning, the other parents expressed ideas about children's learning processes that were more consistent with current reforms. For example, an equal number of the parents (35%) believed that direct (hands-on) experience explained school learning. Another sixteen percent believed that social interaction was a critical mechanism accounting for learning. One mother, who endorsed the value of children "figuring it out for themselves", said that "a light will go off in their head" as a result of the open exchange of ideas during classroom conversations with groups of children. The remaining parents saw motivation and home-school consistency (10%) as key determinants of learning. One parent did not have an opinion.

Parent Beliefs about the Role of Teachers and Parents

Parents' ideas about the role teachers should play in the classroom also tended to be consistent with those of the reforms. Parents first discussed their beliefs about how teachers should go about meeting the goals the parent had identified as important. Parents talked about "making it relevant." About half of the parents (48%) believed the role of the teacher was to expose children to new ideas, activities, and problems and to facilitate individual exploration of new information and ideas. Nearly one-third of the parents (32%) said the role was defined by focusing on the student either by beginning from student's knowledge or by connecting school material to meaningful experiences in the student's life. Fewer parents (19%) expressed traditional ideas of teachers as transmitters of knowledge, including two parents who mentioned the importance of informing parents which they saw as the teacher's responsibility.

Parents then discussed their children's interests and abilities. The majority of parents viewed themselves as jointly responsible with schools for furthering children's talents and interests. They believed that the teacher's role in promoting individual development was assigning projects, providing enrichment opportunities, and allowing for individualized instruction. Whether parents were discussing furthering basic skills or developing children's interests, the majority saw the primary parental role as providing encouragement, positive feedback, and support to their children. Parents also emphasized the importance of providing enriching activities, materials, and experiences. They talked about providing materials, lessons, and taking children places. For instance, one mother said, "I'd rather get him something he can learn from (for holidays and birthdays) than some junky toy that's going to be thrown away in two weeks. . . . And we visit museums so he can see. . . . We buy him books on the subjects he is interested in, which helps his reading, but it also helps him learn about the things he's interested in."

Parent Views on Assessment

Surprisingly, given the political hoopla in the district, parent views on methods of assessment also supported reform views. Parent ratings of the informative value of different means of determining learning progress can be seen in Table One. The mean and standard deviation for each item are reported. Also included on the table are the percentages of parents endorsing each source as very, somewhat, or not helpful. Overall, parents rated authentic forms of assessment as most informative. For instance, parents rated the work that the child brings home from school as the single most important source of information; 89% of the parents found these to be a very important indicator of how the child was doing in school. Also highly rated were feelings the child expresses about school, their experience with the child (including homework), and discussions with the classroom teacher. Achievement tests were rated as very important by 32% and as not important by 21% of parents.

Table 1: Parent Endorsements of Information Sources about Children's Learning

		Percentages of Parents Rating the Value of Source		
Source	Mean (SD)	Very	Somewhat	Not
1. Papers child brings home from school	2.89 (.32)	89	11	0
2. Feelings child expresses	2.78 (.43)	74	21	5
3. Experience with child, including homework	2.74 (.45)	79	26	0
4. Conference/discuss with teacher	2.74 (.45)	79	26	0
5. Newsletters	2.58 (.51)	58	42	0
6. Report cards	2.42 (.77)	58	26	16
7. Personal educ. background	2.42 (.69)	53	37	10
8. Achievement tests, if given in grade 2	2.10 (.74)	32	47	21
9. Experience with older children	2.06 (.83)	32	32	26
10. Opinions of friends, neighbors, relatives	1.63 (.83)	21	21	58

One parent expanded upon the value of portfolios as compared to grades, "I've noticed, you know, positive feedback is good, but if she (child) can see it herself. A real good example was when we looked (at the portfolio) and in the beginning she only had like two sentences written and then later she had a whole paragraph. You know, I saw that and she saw that, and she felt really good about that, so I think that's a good way of saying, this is where you're at now. Look at how you have progressed!"

Parent Beliefs about Teaching Expertise

The final issue examined was the justification parents used to decide if a teacher was an expert. The majority of parents (57%) used their own children's reactions to a teacher as the criterion for determining educational expertise and effectiveness. For example, one mother identified a teacher she knew as a real expert in teaching. When asked how she knew this, the mother replied, "Because, she was great with my son." Another mother said, "Well, I am not a teacher, but I do know my kids so I look at how they are learning from her and how they like her." Another said, "If my daughter wants to go to school and wants to give her teacher presents, then I think that teacher is an expert." Slightly less than a third of the parents (32%) suggested that the common good (in other words, all the children) mattered in deciding how expert an individual was as a teacher. These parents tended to argue that you would have to look at the overall class achievement or how clearly understood the subject matter was by the class as a result of expert explanation by the teacher. Only two parents (6%) based their criteria on professional qualities like educational preparation, knowledge, and dispositions towards ideas. Two parents did not give codeable answers; they seemed confused about the concept of teachers as experts.

Discussion and Implications

Overall, parents seemed to agree more with educators on the means than ends of reforms. There appeared to be significant discontinuity between the educational goals of parents and those of the reforms, yet parent views of instructional approaches, assessment, and teacher's roles were more congruous with current reforms. These areas of agreement may form a basis from which to work in establishing home-school partnerships. Examination of parent beliefs and reasoning suggest considerations for and approaches to including parents in their children's education.

Reformers need to take seriously parents' desire to be assured that their children are learning the "basics" and that children's needs are being addressed. In the current enthusiasm for school reform, professionals may take for granted that parents understand that new perspectives on subject matter, instruction, and learning are geared toward improving children's preparation for the future and toward developing knowledge in the content areas. Emphasizing that all parties want children to gain academic skills may be essential to garnering parent support. Parental views about assessment indicate that parents prefer and may be persuaded by concrete evidence that children are progressing. This finding is consistent with those of Shepard and Bleim (1995) that parents are amenable to authentic forms of assessment. Strategies for promoting parents understanding of their children's progress and for talking with parents about projections for the future and the practicality of reform goals need to be found.

The importance of gathering views from as many parents as were willing to express them should be stressed. Most parents held different views than the few parents who complained to the principals, wrote letters to the local newspaper, or ran for school board on an anti-reform platform. This study suggests that schools have much to gain by talking with a broad sample of all parents rather than by changing policy or shutting parents out because of generalizations or fear based on complaints made by a small minority of vocal parents. Otherwise, schools are in danger of greasing the squeaky wheels while ignoring the majority.

Not surprisingly, parents held diverse views on each issue; they were not a monolithic interest group. Konzal (1996) also identified a wide range in parent beliefs about education in one seemingly homogenous community. A critical questions raised by this variance in parental views is how schools will make decisions. Will the majority rule? What will be the relative weight given to the views of parents and to the "expert" stance of school teachers and administrators? Which issues will be jointly decided and which may be best left to those individuals with specialization? Like prior research by Carr (1996), parents expressed a lack of educational knowledge and expertise as evidenced by statements like "I am not a teacher." Parent responses to questions about teacher expertise and promoting thinking in the present study revealed that parents had limited knowledge about professional practice. In their desire to include parents at the table, many who champion parent participation in decision-making have not addressed this important issue.

An additional cautionary note about parent representatives on decision-making committees needs to be made. The majority of parents in this study based their views of what was valuable on the needs and dispositions of their individual child. This finding is also consistent with research by Carr (1996) that identified the most frequent justification parents provided for participation in school decision-making opportunities as concern for their individual child. On the one hand, this tendency is to be expected and encouraged. Parents should be advocates for their children. On the other hand, if the parent representative has an agenda based on their own child(ren), this limits their representativeness, in effect creating a new power elite. Perhaps schools should attempt to obtain the opinions of all parents. One way to accomplish this is to conduct focus groups or surveys of all parents on important issues. A less formal approach is to use the natural flow of information in communities

(Weenig & Midden, 1991) by having members of the school community present and discuss issues with others in their social circle and report back to the committees. Communication among parents and teachers also needs to be fostered, so that the front-line adults can work effectively towards providing for the education of each child. Direct attention toward meeting children's learning needs on a daily basis, both at home and school, may be the most effective way to direct parents' advocacy efforts.

The latter suggestion is consistent with parents' own views of their role in children's education. Overwhelmingly, parents defined their role as providing support and encouragement to their children. Interestingly, in rating the value of sources of information on how the child was learning, more parents were interested in their children's feelings than in achievement test results. In this way, parents demonstrated that they were attuned to the whole child. The importance of sensitivity to children's emotional adjustment during learning tasks should not be overlooked. This is a quality at which Japanese mothers excel, and one which has been used to explain Japanese children's diligence and academic achievement (Bacon & Ichikawa, 1988; Reischauer, 1977). An important way that schools may involve parents as experts on their children is to elicit and listen to parents' understanding of how children are faring emotionally with their learning. Teachers, in contrast to parents, are not very aware of children's psychological distress (Shumow, 1997).

Parents also saw themselves as providing enrichment opportunities to enhance their children's education. Children's learning and classroom lessons may benefit if teachers encourage this practice. Writing, science, social studies, and mathematics are enriched when extended from children's experiences in their families and neighborhoods (Calkins, 1994; Corno, 1996; Hill, 1994). Considering the findings of Lareau (1989), parents enthusiasm for this role may be a result of the middle-class sample because working class parents may define schools as responsible for teaching academic skills and need encouragement to view their homes and communities as contexts for sharing with school. This issue warrants further investigation with diverse samples.

In summary, parents' views of school goals, learning processes, parent and teacher roles, and assessment were examined in relationship to constructivist perspectives underlying reforms. Results indicate considerable diversity among parents and raise issues about parent involvement in school decision-making. Few parents have embraced the goals of the reforms. Increased communication and sharing among parents and teachers about children's learning, adjustment, and progress, as well as representation of children's home experiences in school offer promising avenues for promoting home school relations.

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Parent Involvement: The Key To Improved Student Achievement

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There is a sizable body of research literature supporting the involvement of parents in educational settings and activities. Because the existing literature base on parent involvement is large and growing, we have chosen to present only a summary of selected research findings and relevant literature in order to establish a framework underpinning the legitimacy of our parent involvement investigation. Epstein (1995) for example sets the stage by defining parent involvement as families and communities who take an active role in creating a caring educational environment. She further asserts that parents who are involved with their children's education are those who consistently demonstrate good parenting skills, communicate with the school staff, volunteer their time in the school, help their children learn at home, take an active role in school-related decision making, and who regularly collaborate with the school community. Christensen and Cleary (1990) suggest that parents' active involvement results in greater recognition of teachers' skills, better teacher evaluations from their principals, enhanced parental understanding of the inner workings of the school, and higher school ratings in effectiveness and program success. Additionally, in schools where student achievement was reported, Loucks (1992) found that parent involvement was a significant factor in both accelerated and sustained student academic performance.

While we have little argument with the general premises stated above, we wanted to know if similar improvement might be attained by innercity elementary students (specifically third-grade students) if parents

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became more directly involved with their children's education. To find the answers, we researched, planned for, implemented, and evaluated such a parent involvement program in a Chicago inner-city elementary school over two years. The program, activities, and results of this inner-city parent involvement program are reported herein.

Implementing a structured parent involvement program in an inner-city school, primarily to improve student achievement, was our central purpose. The expected outcomes included both cognitive and affective improvement in academic areas. While the need to improve student achievement on cognitive, standardized tests was essential to us, it was also important to show student improvement in the "affective" areas of educational performance. Several measurement tools were considered and utilized because using standardized test data alone takes considerable time to obtain and analyze. Less easily measured affective aspects of children's development, such as attitude, morale, and self-esteem, were studied because there is a widely held belief that student attitudes, morale, and self-esteem impact student academic achievement almost as much as does their cognitive development (Loucks, 1992; Johnson, 1994; Jackson & Cooper, 1992).

Since other authorities (Aronson, 1996; Columbo, 1995), agreed that student achievement improved when parents became involved, it was also an important task for us to discover the extent to which these findings would be supported by our own parental involvement program investigation. Using a slightly different focus, we set out to discover what, if any, specific academic impact a parent involvement program might have on third-grade children, their parents, and the community in an inner-city school setting.

An Inner-City Parent Involvement Program

We began the program with frank discussions about ways to improve student learning with the faculty of the selected elementary school. It didn't take long for the faculty to recognize that without increased parent support, few other ideas or resources would likely impact the learning environment as much as having parents become, in effect, extensions of the teachers and their classrooms. In short order, eight third-grade teachers agreed about the need for a parent involvement program and decided to support the concept by involving themselves in this undertaking.

In planning for our inner-city elementary school (third-grade level) parent involvement program, we first asked ourselves, then representatives from the various stakeholders (parents, teachers, students, community members) the following questions:

- Are parents, in fact, welcomed in the school?
- Can we measure with confidence the extent to which parents are involved in their children's education?
- To what extent do parents volunteer their time in the school, and for what purposes?
- Are community businesses and organizations invited to work with the school and, if so, in what ways?
- Are parents capable of assisting teachers with instruction, and does this assistance enhance academic success?
- Do present staff development programs provide teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively incorporate parents into their children's education?
- To what extent should parents participate in instructional decisions?
- Is "school climate" affected when parents are more directly involved?
- Do parent involvement programs provide for increased access and equity for all students?

Clearly, the enthusiastic, although at times contentious, discussions surrounding these questions led to our deciding to establish the parent involvement program outlined in Epstein's (1995) framework for building parental partnerships. Because Epstein's guide highlights the importance of designing integrated social contexts which foster children's academic development, we believed that the model best suited our setting, conditions, and program goals. Specifically, Epstein summarized six effective program characteristics and guidelines for building parent partnerships:

- parenting;
- communicating;
- volunteering;
- learning at home;
- decision making; and
- collaboration with the community at large.

She suggested further that schools follow a five step implementation process:

- create an action team;
- obtain funds and other support;
- identify starting points;
- develop a three-year plan; and
- continue planning and working to improve the program.

These elements, in combination, seemed to provide the fundamentals for the parent involvement program we wished to implement. Therefore, after reviewing the literature, holding meetings with the staff, community leaders, and selected consultants, Epstein's parent involvement model was adopted for implementation. The Local School Council (LSC) also approved the Epstein model and our implementation strategies. Additionally, in order to stay abreast of the most current practices with respect to parent involvement, the school joined the National Network of Partnership Schools (Improving School-Family-Community Connections) housed at John Hopkins University. This parent involvement model also addressed the mandates imposed by the local school needs assessment survey, the Chicago School Reform Board of Trustees, the central office administration, and accommodated the priorities of the Chicago School Reform Act of 1995.

Those directly involved in implementing the parent program included eight faculty members, the LSC, all parents of students in grade three, 175 third-grade students, and representatives from the community. To further assist in the implementation of the parent involvement program, others were called upon for assistance and included: community leaders; corporations and small businesses; colleges and universities; and the relevant regional city and community service offices on Chicago's south side.

Process and Procedures

A number of selected procedural strategies were employed as the program was implemented. Parents and the larger community were informed about the program. Next, a needs assessment survey was sent home to the parents of all third-grade students. Of the 175 students, 48% were selected to be participants in the treatment group. Committees consisting of the participating faculty, LSC members, and selected (mostly volunteer) parents developed aspects, activities, and events that would be prepared for implementation. We also believed that it was important for students to be made aware of the impending parent involvement program and to be given opportunities to express their concerns and ideas. Thus, the participating students (third-graders) were informed of the program and surveyed. They noted overwhelmingly that they would like their parents to be involved in various school activities. Included in their desires for increased parental involvement were: parent attendance at performances or athletic events; parents accompanying them on field trips; parents serving as resource persons for in- and out-of-class activities; parents helping with the school's fundraising programs; and, parents themselves taking advantage of learning opportunities offered by the school. As Epstein (1995) reminded us, if students witnessed their parents taking an active role and interest in school-related activities, improved academic achievement was more likely.

The administration needed to be on-board as well. Bobango (1994) reinforced this belief when he found that principals who "visualize" the people who are served by the school are not only better able to define the significance of parent involvement, but can more easily and readily gain faculty input and support for such programs.

One of the most important factors, and a challenging one, was to identify activities and events that would attract parents – to cause them to want to become involved in ways that they had not previously experienced. These initial ideas were identified as a result of the needs survey, interviews with selected parents, staff and community input, literature reviews, and input from the school's LSC and administration. They included:

- Parenting workshops (among the most popular activities)
- Gathering data and analyzing it for activity planning purposes
- Development of parent outreach training programs
- Obtaining information from the needs assessment analysis
- Planning alternative for parents with special needs
- Seeking funding for additional program implementation
- Establishing open houses (in-school and throughout the community)
- Hosting family nights (meet your child's teacher at the public library; family nights at the school where parents had the opportunity to utilize school library and the computer lab with their children)
- Creating popular nutrition workshops
- Promoting parent discussion groups
- Rabbit Ears Radio activity
- Parent-oriented newsletters and communication activities
- Student organized skits (for and with parent involvement)

Among the most popular activities were the various parent workshops. Parents were given the opportunity to learn how to construct a story with their children Because reading is such a key academic component, we were particularly interested in following student progress in this area. In addition to providing greater interest, this activity also helped to enhance their child's creative writing skills. The parents were also provided with techniques designed to assist them in helping their children successfully complete homework assignments. Parents were also taught the techniques of reading with their children, which allowed for in-depth discussions about the stories they read together. Parent workshops in art were also conducted so that parents could better understand methods of teaching reading through art. This also gave the parents an understanding of some of the ways in which the curriculum is integrated. By creating art projects, for example, students could also develop their writing skills, a benefit which would later contribute to their required language arts needs and reading skills.

Parent volunteers were recruited from those who participated in the multiple parent involvement workshops. Through these volunteers, a parent patrol was established to assist the staff with student supervision outside of the school building during the early mornings, after school, and in the lunchroom. Parents also volunteered to assist in classrooms and in the school's central office. Due to this volunteer activity, it also became easier to obtain parent chaperones to accompany classes on field trips. Even school fundraising became more interesting for parents because they now had a better sense of both the need for and the benefits from such activity.

In order for the program to have continuity, it was important to establish activities that would create an atmosphere conducive to school-home communication, as well as to better "connect" teachers, parents, and students. After having interviewed fifty principals in Southern Illinois, Loucks (1992) discovered that parents, when asked, could indeed identify the kinds of help they wanted. They asked for more frequent notes or phone calls from teachers, increased opportunities for one-on-one interaction between the teacher and themselves, opportunities for parent/teacher problem solving, assistance in understanding instructional strategies, and how they could help their children improve the quality of homework assignments, classroom work, and behavior as they also relate to academic success. Moreover, Loucks, as a result of his findings, identified ten strategies for improving communications and stakeholder relationships:

- parent/student switch days
- parent/student fundraising
- teacher/parent roundtable discussions
- parent/teacher organizations
- newsletters
- solicitation of parent volunteers
- alumni events
- invitational events
- good news cards
- parent classes (i.e. parenting, homework, communication)

In further supporting the need for close teacher/parent relationships, so vital to successful parent involvement programs, Rosenthal and Sawyers (1996) presented a collaborative, solution-based approach that teachers could use to attract parents' cooperation in creating effective, family-friendly schools. They found that barriers to effective and collaborative educational systems included a lack of teacher preparation in systemic interpersonal skills, a lack of family-friendly school programs, and teacher difficulties in focusing on family and educational strengths. In addition, Thompson (1993), utilizing eight member schools of the League of Schools Reaching Out, found that given patience, hard work, supportive leadership, and informed facilitation, the two streams of parent and teacher empowerment *can* come together for improved student academic achievement. Referring to Green (1992) in her opinion on Chicago School Reform, Thompson suggested that the professionalism of teachers in contrast to parents and community members who have not been formally trained as educators "is bound to provide an underlying tension in the reform process" (Green, 1992, p. 13-14). Staff development activities took on new relevance once teachers better understood the seriousness of teacher/parent relationships.

Pertinent Outcomes for the Parent Involvement Program

Without a structured parent involvement program that addressed specific areas of parent and teacher concerns, parents would likely continue their rather minimal involvement in school-related activities. Why shouldn't they? Most parents do not get seriously involved, yet their children, seemingly, "make it through the system." We were not satisfied with this status quo condition, thus, two important outcomes became increasingly essential: (1) to increase the number of parents who would become directly involved with their children's education, and (2) to determine the general significance and academic impact of such involvement. With these two outcomes at the top of our list, we also sought to measure several others:

- achievement and in-school participation would rise
- attendance patterns would improve
- self-esteem would be greater and more in evidence
- discipline referrals would decline
- parents would be more supportive of teachers and of learning
- community "togetherness" would be enhanced
- the program would gain in popularity and in salience

Results

Clearly, those who gained the most through the implementation of the parent involvement program were the students, demonstrated by improved academic achievement. Third grade reading achievement improved by 4 months as measured by the ITBS. Reading grade equivalent mean scores increased from a gain of 2 years, 7 months in 1995 to 3 years, 1 month in 1998. Student achievement in both reading and vocabulary increased. Vocabulary grade equivalent mean scores increased from a gain of 2 years, 4 months in 1995 to 3 years, 1 month in 1998. Third graders performed below grade level, on average, in reading and vocabulary achievement on the ITBS between 1995 and 1997. Results indicated significant improvement, specifically in reading, for the treatment group (students whose parents participated in the parent involvement program) as compared with students whose parents did not participate. Similar results existed in vocabulary improvement for the treatment group. Other academic achievement tests also demonstrated improvement; one reading mastery test showed an 85% gain.

The number of parents participating in the program grew over the two-year period from 5% in 1996 to 48% in 1998 (the period during and following implementation of our parent involvement program). In addition, participating parents reported three very significant outcomes for them as parents: (1) their interest in and appreciation for education, teachers, and learning did, in fact increase; (2) the level of interest their children had in school improved as did their attitudes about school and about their teachers; and (3) parents' respect for the role of teachers and for the impact they have on children changed dramatically. With respect to several of the other anticipated outcomes, the following evidence is noteworthy:

- increased participation in school activities such as basketball, social center events, and the Lighthouse Program
- improved attendance patterns as attested to by teachers' monthly summaries (from 88% to 92%)
- enhanced self-esteem as reported by teachers and parents
- decrease in the number of discipline referrals, as recorded by teachers, as well as by those logged in the school's central office; from 15 (19.4%) in 1996 to 10 referrals (9.0%) in 1998.

Additionally, parents took a renewed interest in learning, both for themselves and for their children. The parent volunteer program, for example, increased in number of active participants by 43% during the two-year implementation period. Parents also assisted in making contacts with community leaders in obtaining their valuable assistance with school-related programs and academic achievement initiatives. The community as a whole, as they became aware of this new partnership, took more interest in the school by helping with and supporting activities such as sports programs, community clean-ups, and by providing other classroom-related assistance, expertise, and resources. Indeed, the foundation had been provided for expanding the program to other grade-level students and parents.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The inner-city parent involvement program began through a needs assessment survey. It provided valuable information for us, the school's faculty and staff, the LSC members, and parents with clear understandings about the need for parental involvement. It also pointed the directions for both short and long term goals and objectives. Moreover, the survey provided indications of growing parent concerns about their children, their children's' education, as well as an appreciation for teachers who, on a daily basis, are in positions to influence, guide, and provide for their children's education.

It is our belief, based on the success of this endeavor, the time, effort, and commitment required from all stakeholders to build a strong parental involvement program is indeed offset by the improvement in students' academic performance and attitude toward learning. It is essential that the model selected be adapted to the needs of the particular school, parents, and community. Further study of the relationship and importance assigned to parent involvement programs (i.e., the impact of those parents participating versus those declining to become involved) should be conducted. Ongoing staff development is very important as teachers engage parents and community leaders. A review of school and district policies and procedures when recruiting parents and community leaders is helpful and connotes district as well as school level support and interest. We further recommend joining a network of schools such as the National Network of Partnership Schools. The training and orientation provided will benefit a school or district through networking with other schools and personnel. It is also helpful to obtain related guides and parent involvement materials, such training manuals, as most consist of detailed plans, strategies, and suggestions for program implementation.

There were, of course, several program inhibitors. For example, there was the absence of an adequate budget; facility limitations which narrowed the number and scope of activities; and, a lack of available time for teachers and activity development. Implementing several of the programs was constrained because funding from outside sources was unavailable or too difficult to acquire in a timely manner. Time commitments on the part of parents made it difficult for some to attend in-school activities, especially during the daytime. We recommend attention to these matters as other schools and leaders consider similar programs. Still, even with these inhibitors, the program was never in jeopardy. If hindsight is any measure, the only serious mistake we made was not implementing a structured parent involvement program years ago.

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Family-School Partnerships in Prekindergarten At-Risk Programs: An Exploratory Study

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The Impact of Home Visitation vs. Family Center Models

With an increasing number of families characterized by single-parent households, reconstituted or blended families, foster homes, extended families, with relatives, or in a variety of other family situations, early childhood programs are serving preschool and kindergarten students from more diverse backgrounds (Epstein, 1988; Powell, 1989). The challenge for family support professionals working in early childhood settings is to restructure their program policies and practices to reflect the new realities of the diverse backgrounds of the children being served. In addition, a number of states and local public school systems are offering programs for preschool aged children from economically disadvantaged and high-risk backgrounds (Karweit, 1993). As a result, educators are increasingly being called upon to develop appropriate ways of working with children and families from cultural and linguistic backgrounds that are different from their own (Powell, 1989).

In addition to these changes in family structure, parents, educators, and policymakers are all asserting the value of positive home-school partnerships. In a recent national survey, 95% of public school parents indicated that it is very important to encourage families to take a more active part in educating their children (Elam, Rose, & Gallup, 1993). Along with the polls of public opinion on the importance of involving

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families in children's education, studies have consistently indicated that active parental involvement in elementary school settings can have a positive impact on all aspects of a child's school performance (Connors & Epstein, 1995; Henderson, 1987; Powell, 1989).

Support for this emphasis on parental involvement in early childhood settings is limited (Taylor & Machida, 1994). For example, since its inception in the mid-1960s, Head Start programs have been required to include a parental involvement component (Brush, Gaidurgis, & Best, 1993), yet only 5 of the 76 studies included in the Head Start synthesis Project meta-analysis addressed the impact of such involvement (McKey, Condelli, Ganson, Barrett, McConkey, & Plantz, 1985). These 5 studies provide limited support for the view that a positive relationship exists between parental involvement in Head Start and children's cognitive development. Two more recent studies add to this limited support base for parental involvement in early childhood programs. In a large-scale longitudinal study of inner-city minority children identified as being at risk for later school failure, Reynolds (1991, 1992) found that parental involvement in kindergarten programs had both direct and indirect impacts on student achievement in math and reading one and two years later. Similarly, Taylor and Machida (1994) found that active parental involvement in Head Start programs led to improved classroom behaviors and higher learning skills at the end of the school year.

In spite of limited empirical support, a belief in the value of positive home-school partnerships has moved early childhood programs toward including parent involvement activities as an important component of their programs. In addition, local school systems that offer prekindergarten programs for children from economically disadvantaged and "high-risk" backgrounds are typically required to include a family/parent involvement component in order to receive state funds (Karweit, 1993). The increasing numbers of states and local public school systems offering prekindergarten programs for children identified as being at-risk for later school failure and the emphasis on the importance of including a parent involvement component present challenges to family support and early childhood professionals. Reynolds (1992), McLoyd (1990), Comer (1988), and others have argued that low-income families face many problems (e.g., financial distress, psychological stress, etc.) that make parental involvement less likely to occur in school settings. The same holds true for early childhood programs. Powell (1993) suggests that little is known about which parental involvement strategies are most effective in meeting the needs of the diverse groups of families being served by early childhood programs and what barriers may be limiting their implementation.

In order to reach out to parents from diverse backgrounds, schools need to offer a broad range of options to families. Adding a home visitation component of parent involvement initiatives has been one way of supporting families that might be too distrustful or uncomfortable with center-based programs. Research conducted by Robert and Wasik (1990) indicates there are more than 4,000 home visiting programs currently in the US. The most frequently identified purpose of these home visitation programs was to promote children's development (e.g., physical, cognitive, social-emotional, etc.) and to provide general support for families to enhance parenting skills.

Recently, early childhood educators have begun to express interest in home visitation and the opportunities this approach provides to work with individuals within a family context, and to understand more about the life situation of children and families. This interest in home visitation programs, however, is not new. Home visiting programs have existed in the US since the 1890s in a variety of forms in health, education, and social support programs (Gomby, Larson, Lewit, & Behrman, 1993). Home visiting has been utilized as a means to enhance children's cognitive and social development, particularly in early intervention programs established in the 1960s and 1970s for children with special needs (Powell, 1990). Head Start programs also used home visitation to provide educational and social services to children and families (Zigler & Freedman, 1987).

The ultimate goal of most programs that utilize home visitation is to promote child and parent outcomes. Historically, the emphasis of involving parents in home visiting programs has been on teaching parenting skills with the assumption that desirable changes in parents would contribute to children's developmental outcomes. More recently, however, there has been an equal emphasis on child and adult outcomes. That is, home visiting programs also seek to improve parental outcomes such as adult literacy, parenting competency, and job training (Powell, 1993a). Home visiting services play an important role in helping families coping with poverty and social isolation by building a bridge between families and needed resources. These services can also help families understand their feelings and become more capable in their lives (Halpern, 1993).

Despite the historical and recent interest in home visiting programs, there is limited research evidence regarding the effectiveness of this approach (Powell, 1990). Findings from such studies are mixed. In addition, home visiting programs vary in their goals, assumptions, content, and staffing (Powell, 1993a). Most studies on the impact of programs that utilize home visitation examine the developmental outcomes of children with special needs in early intervention programs. For example, based on their longitudinal study comparing the cost-effectiveness of a center-based, low parent involvement intervention and a home parent training intervention program for preschool children with moderate speech disorders, Eiserman, Weber, and McCoun (1992, 1995) report a general comparability between the two program models. Although their results did not show the superiority of one type of program over another, findings did indicate the need to offer various options to families in the programs. These authors suggest that different types of interventions may be beneficial for different groups of children and families. In a similar cost-benefit analysis study that compared home-based and center-based interventions, Barnett, Escobar, and Ravsten (1988) found that home-based intervention programs were more efficient than center-based interventions in terms of children's language improvement.

These studies examined the impact of home-based vs. center-based intervention programs on children's developmental outcomes. There is limited empirical data that examines the impact of different models of program delivery on the various types of parental involvement activities in early childhood settings. The purpose of the current exploratory study was to empirically examine the various ways in which parents become involved in state-funded prekindergarten programs for children identified as being at-risk for later school failure, and to identify patterns of parental participation that occur in response to the different models of home-school partnership initiatives (i.e., home visitation vs. center-based models).

The concept of parental involvement has been a primary cornerstone of efforts by state and local school systems in implementing prekindergarten programs for children at risk for later school failure. A major problem with many of these efforts has been the inconsistency and lack of coherence in how parental involvement is defined (Reynolds, 1992). In this study, the concept of parent involvement was defined in terms of Epstein's (1987) model of parent involvement. Epstein's (1987) typology breaks down the concept of parent involvement into five categories: Type 1: Basic Obligations of Parents (e.g., building positive home environments that foster learning and development of children); Type 2: Basic Obligations of Schools (e.g., communicating with parents about program expectations, children's progress, and evaluations); Type 3: Parent Involvement at School (e.g., volunteering in classrooms to help teachers, students, and other parents); Type 4: Parent Involvement in Learning and Developmental Activities at Home (e.g., providing information and ideas to parents about how to interact with children to help them with reading activities, learning packets); and Type 5: Parent Involvement in Governance and Advocacy (e.g., including parents in school decisions, advisory councils, and parent-teacher organizations).

Although originally used in work with elementary and secondary schools, this model has been found to be applicable in guiding the development of comprehensive parental involvement components of public school prekindergarten programs for children at risk for later school failure (Epstein, 1992). It is also reflective of the move by many states and locally funded school-based prekindergarten programs toward providing comprehensive services as they attempt to meet the needs of children and families from disadvantaged backgrounds (Powell, 1993).

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine the various ways in which parents become involved in state-funded prekindergarten programs for children identified as being at-risk for later school failure. Unlike most studies which examine the impact of parental involvement on the developmental outcome of the children, the focus of the current investigation was to collect descriptive data on the impact of different models of program delivery (a home visitation versus family center model) on the various types of parental involvement activities implemented and patterns of parental involvement that occur. The following research questions were used to guide data collection: 1) What types of parent involvement and home-school partnership initiatives are planned and implemented? 2) How do the different models of parental involvement initiatives (home visitation versus family center model) influence the nature and method of the initiatives, who initiated them, and the frequency and proportion of family members of enrolled children who had contact with school staff members? 3) What are the factors that encourage and facilitate parent involvement in prekindergarten at-risk programs?

Participants

The target populations for this exploratory study were 21 teachers at two state-funded prekindergarten at-risk programs in neighboring Midwestern public school systems. Both programs enroll children ages three and four that come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. These children have been identified as being at-risk for later school failure based on a combination of the poverty level status of their families along with other risk factors such as teen parents, foster parents, single parent households, and limited education of the parents. These programs provide a variety of comprehensive services such as preschool classes, parent education and support groups, adult education classes, and family resource centers for enrolled children and their families. Both programs are funded by the State Board of Education and are similar to each other in all aspects (e.g., funding base, criteria for enrollment, services provided to enrolled children and their families, staff training and backgrounds, and families being served) except for the models used to facilitate parent involvement and home-school partnerships. The close proximity of the location of the two programs (i.e., communities that share common boundaries) helped in facilitating the data collection process and ensured similar populations being served by both prekindergarten programs.

One program uses a home visitation model to establish home-school partnerships while the other utilizes a family center model for parental involvement initiatives. Teachers in the program involving home visitation make home visits one day per week to families of enrolled children. The second program utilizes a family center model which offers various parent involvement services that encourage families to be involved at school.

Data Collection/Measures

All seven teachers at the home visitation program and all 14 teachers at the family center model participated in data collection procedures for the study. The primary method used in data collection for the current study was the gathering of information on the various parental involvement strategies implemented by school personnel and the patterns of parental participation that occur in response to the different types of home-school partnership initiatives. Detailed information was collected in thirteen two-week segments during the 1996/97 academic year for all parent involvement activities and contacts teachers had at both prekindergarten at-risk programs. The majority of the information collected was already required in one form or another by the State Board of Education, but not at the level of detail needed for the current study. Based on information gained from a pilot study, a data-recording sheet was developed for the teachers to use in tracking all initiatives involving family members. On this sheet teachers would record information for each contact they had with a parent and/or family member. The types of information recorded for each contact included the method of contact (i.e., phone, school visit, home visit, note, other), the nature/focus of the contact (i.e., developmental progress, behavior, health issues, materials request, volunteer request, administrative, classroom visit, learning & developmental activities, relationship building, parent support, advocacy/advisory, and other), who initiated the contact (i.e., school, family/home), and who was contacted (i.e., parent, relative). Data recorded on these sheets reflected a continuum of parent involvement contacts teachers had (e.g., one-on-one parent/teacher conferences to family members attending a school open house event).

To simplify the data collection process and ensure greater consistency of data, teachers at both program sites were trained in how to use the data recording sheets at the beginning of the academic year in which parent involvement data was collected. Once trained, teachers used the data recording sheets to track their parent involvement contacts as opposed to the contact logs normally required by the State Board of Education. A four-week period of time was used to allow teachers to become comfortable with the data recording sheets before actual data for the study was collected. During this time, research assistants visited each teacher on a weekly basis to review information recorded on their sheets, to clarify ambiguous information recorded, to identify potential problem areas, and to answer any questions the teachers may have had. Once the four-week training and familiarization period had been completed, parent involvement data for the study was collected at both sites in thirteen consecutive two-week segments. Research assistants held biweekly meetings with each teacher at the end of each two-week period to review and collect the data recording sheets, clarify any ambiguous information, and answer any possible questions. At the end of the 26-week data collection period, each teacher received a $250 stipend as partial compensation for the extra time required to assist in this data collection process.

At the beginning of the academic year in which parent involvement data was collected, teachers at both sites completed a packet of questionnaires that included items on demographic backgrounds, attitudinal measures on parent involvement in early childhood settings, and open-ended questions. Demographic items in the questionnaires included the teacher's age, educational background, years in the profession, and number of parent involvement courses taken as an undergraduate and graduate.

An adapted version of the General Attitudes Toward Parent Involvement (GATPI; Garinger & McBride, 1995) scale was used to assess teachers' attitudes toward parent involvement in early childhood programs. The adapted version of the GATPI asked teachers to respond to 13 items along a five-point Likert type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = no opinion; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree). Sample items from this measure include, "Parent involvement can help teachers be more effective with students." and "Teachers cannot take the time to involve parents in meaningful ways." Positively and negatively worded items were included in the GATPI in order to prevent a response bias. Internal consistency on this measure was moderately high, with an alpha of .68.

Three open-ended questions were included in the questionnaires completed by all teachers. These questions asked teachers to identify what they considered to be the benefit of encouraging parent involvement in early childhood programs, the barriers that limit the amount of parent involvement, and those factors that would facilitate parent involvement in prekindergarten at-risk programs. All responses were categorized according to themes that emerged for each question. To ensure reliability in the construction of themes and coding of response items, two members of the research team independently reviewed responses from the questionnaires and identified themes that emerged. Identification of themes and coding of responses completed individually were then compared. Discrepancies in the identified themes and coding of items were highlighted, with responses being reviewed and discussed until a consensus was reached on the coding. The level of agreement on the initial coding of responses was .71.

Results

Means and standard deviations were computed on each of the demographic measures, as well as scores on the General Attitudes Toward Parent Involvement measure (see Table 1). Due to the exploratory nature of the study being reported on as well as the relatively small sample size (i.e., 14 teachers at the family center based model and 7 at the home visitation model), p values of .10 or less were used to determine whether significant differences existed in all analyses conducted. Scores on the GATPI suggest that teachers at both programs held fairly positive viewpoints of parent involvement in general. Independent means t-tests revealed no significant differences between teachers in the family center model and those in the home visitation model on any of the demographic variables, as well as scores on the General Attitudes Toward Parent Involvement measures. These findings indicate that teachers at both sites had similar backgrounds in terms of their education and teaching experience, and that both groups held similar attitudes toward parent involvement in general.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations—Demographics and Attitudinal Measures

Variable	Center-Based Model[a] *M*	Center-Based Model[a] *SD*	Home Visit Model[b] *M*	Home Visit Model[b] *SD*
Teacher's Age	32.86	8.98	34.00	12.08
Teacher's Education[c]	2.64	.63	2.43	.79
Years in Profession	9.36	7.75	9.86	8.03
Parent Involvement Courses—Undergraduate	.93	.99	.86	.90
Parent Involvement Courses—Graduate	1.14	1.10	.57	.53
General Attitudes Toward Parent Involvement Scale	56.14	4.55	57.14	2.48

[a] $n = 14$
[b] $n = 7$
[c] 1 = high school diploma, 2 = BS, 3 = MS/MEd, 4 = EdS, 5 = Ph.D./EdD

Information from the data recording sheets for each of the 13 two-week periods was collapsed to provide a composite picture of the parent involvement contacts teachers had during this 26-week period. Proportions of contacts were used for each of the major coding categories (i.e., method of contact, nature/focus of contact, who initiated contact, who was contacted) to provide a descriptive picture of different types of home-school partnership initiatives that were planned and implemented, and patterns of parent involvement that occurred in response to the different home-school partnership initiatives (see Table 2). Proportional scores were used due to the unequal number of teachers in the home visitation program and center-based models, as well as the resulting difference in the total number of parent involvement contacts over the 26-week period.

Table 2. Proportion of Parent Involvement Contacts by Category

Contact Category	Center-Based Model	Home Visit Model	t^a
Method of Contact			
phone	.19	.20	-.26
school visit	.29	.35	-1.40
home visit	.01	.13	-7.18***
note	.49	.32	2.31**
Nature of Contact			
developmental progress	.21	.16	1.01
behavioral issues	.03	.03	-.56
health issues	.08	.03	3.00***
material requests	.01	.01	.88
volunteer requests	.03	.06	-2.32**
administrative	.41	.48	-1.16
classroom visits	.01	.04	-2.98**
learning activities	.05	.10	-1.53
relationship building	.11	.06	2.17**
parent support	.01	.02	-1.57
other	.04	.01	2.20*
Who Initiatied Contact			
school	.32	.47	-2.13**
family/home	.67	.52	2.13**

[a] Independent Means *t*-tests
* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Responses to the open-ended questions that asked what teachers considered as the benefits of encouraging parent involvement in early childhood programs, barriers that limit the amount of parent involvement, and factors that would facilitate parent involvement in prekindergarten at-risk programs were categorized according to the themes that emerged. The proportion of the teachers who gave responses to each of the major themes were used due to the unequal number of teachers in the home visitation and family center models and the resulting difference in the total number of responses.

Research Question 1

What types of parent involvement and home-school partnership initiatives are planned and implemented? In order to address the first research question, means were computed on all proportional scores for the parent involvement contact categories (see table 2). Results indicated the most frequently used methods of contact in both programs were written notes sent to homes and families coming to schools. The most frequent nature of contacts at both sites were regarding administrative work and children's developmental progress. Examples of administrative work include parents reporting to the school that their "child will not ride bus home this afternoon" and teachers calling parents to schedule conferences. Examples of contacts which focused on children's developmental progress include parents reporting that their child is able to write his/her name and teachers reporting that their child is making progress in his/her interaction with other children.

Research Question 2

How do the different models of parental involvement initiatives (a home visitation versus family center model) influence the nature and method of the initiatives, which initiated them, and the frequency and proportion of family members of enrolled children who had contact with school staff members? In order to address the second research question, independent means t-tests were conducted on the proportional scores for the various types of parental involvement activities implemented. Due to the small number of participants and exploratory nature of the study, statistical significance was set at $p<.10$. Analyses revealed several significant differences in the two different programs in terms of the patterns of parent involvement. Significant differences in the method of contact emerged. Obviously, teachers in the program that utilized a home visitation component reported a significantly higher proportion of parent contacts via home visits than teachers in the center-based model ($t = -7.18$, $p< .01$). Teachers in the family center model used " written notes" significantly more as a means to contact families than teachers in the home visitation model ($t = 2.31$, $p< .05$). Several significant differences were revealed in terms of the nature of contact made in the two different program models as well. Results indicated that families who have children enrolled in the home visitation model volunteered significantly more ($t = -2.33$, $p < .05$) in school events including accompanying children on field trips, bringing in snacks, and helping with in-class activities. These families also visited classrooms significantly more than the families of children enrolled in the family center model ($t = -2.98$, $p< .01$). Significant differences between the two types of programs were revealed in two other categories of nature of contact. More contacts related to health issues ($t = 3.00$, $p< .01$) and relationship building ($t = 2.17$, $p< .05$) were made between teachers and families in the family center based model compared to those in the home visitation model.

Analyses also revealed significant differences in terms of who initiated contacts between school and families at the two sites. Findings indicated that teachers in the home visitation program initiated a significantly higher proportion of contacts with families than the teachers in the family center program ($t = -2.13$, $p < .05$). In contrast, families in the family center model initiated a significantly higher proportion of the contacts with schools than those in the home visitation programs ($t = 2.13$, $p < .05$). These findings suggest that different models of parental involvement initiatives (a home visitation versus family center model) may influence the method used for parent involvement contacts, nature of these contacts, and patterns of parental involvement that occur in response to the types of home-school partnership initiatives.

Research Question 3

What are the factors that encourage and facilitate parent involvement in prekindergarten at-risk programs? In order to address the third research question, three open-ended questions were asked of teachers at both sites. These questions asked teachers to identify what they consider as the benefits of encouraging parent involvement in early childhood programs, the barriers that limit the amount of parent involvement, and those factors that would facilitate parent involvement in prekindergarten at-risk programs. As mentioned above, the percentage of the teachers (i.e., proportion) who gave responses to each of the major themes was used due to the unequal number of teachers in the home visitation and family center models and the resulting difference in the total number of responses.

Teachers at both sites (86% of the teachers in the home visitation program and 57% of the teachers in the family center program) identified the major benefit of involving parents as empowerment and increased level of parent responsibility. In addition, teachers in the home visitation program viewed support and encouragement for children's learning (71%) and improved learning at school (57%) as the major benefits of parent involvement. Forty-three percent of the teachers in the family center model indicated that the major benefits of involving parents include conveying to children that school is important. Thirty-six percent also identified better understanding of children on teachers' part as a benefit of parent involvement.

In terms of the barriers that limit the amount of parent involvement in early childhood programs, parents' work schedule and lack of time (57% of the teachers in the home visitation program and 50% of the teachers in the family center program) emerged as the biggest barrier at both sites. At the same time, analyses revealed several differences between teachers in the two programs regarding what they saw as barriers to parent participation. Forty-two percent of the teachers in the home visitation program saw multiple stressors under which families live and parents' negative past school experience as major barriers to parent involvement. Twenty-nine percent of these teachers also identified work overloads on the part of school personnel as a barrier. In contrast, 36% of the teachers in the family center model identified a lack of transportation and logistical constraints (i.e., disconnected telephones, messages not reaching home from school) as barriers to parent involvement, while 29% identified parents' lack of interest or perceived importance of home-school partnerships as a factor that limits parent participation. Twenty-one percent of these teachers also saw parents' lack of comfort and negative past school experience as a barrier. Only one teacher in the home visitation program saw lack of transportation and logistical constraints as factors that limit parents' ability to become involved with the program.

When asked to identify those factors that would encourage and facilitate parent involvement in early childhood programs, most teachers expressed the need for dedicated time for parent involvement activities (e.g., "free up time for teachers to contact parents," "allow 1 day per week for planning and implementation of parent involvement activities"). In addition, 43% of the teachers in the program that utilized home visitation indicated that dedicating staff members for parent involvement activities (e.g., employing family support staff to work with families, hiring assistants so that teachers have more time to contact families) would facilitate parent involvement. At the same time, 36% of the teachers in the center based model identified the need to sponsor parent involvement activities (e.g., "provide a variety of opportunities for parents to become involved," "provide parent education on importance of involvement") in order to encourage and facilitate parental involvement.

Discussion

As early childhood programs move toward offering programs for children from low income and high-risk backgrounds and as the field of education acknowledges the importance of involving parents in their children's educational process, it is important to be aware of the different types of home-school partnership initiatives that effectively meet the needs of diverse groups of families. Data from this exploratory study provide information on the impact of a home visitation versus family center model of home-school partnership initiatives utilized in prekindergarten programs for children identified as being at-risk for later school failure. Despite the small number of participants and the exploratory nature of the study, analysis of the data has revealed significantly different patterns of parental involvement that occur in response to the different types of initiatives implemented by school personnel.

Findings from the exploratory analyses revealed that the most frequently used methods of contact in both programs were written notes sent to homes and families coming to schools. The most frequent foci of contacts at prekindergarten programs were regarding administrative work and children's developmental progress. From these results, it could be concluded that a relatively large proportion of parent involvement activities are geared toward maintaining the ongoing functions of the program (e.g., administrative work such as making appointments for parent-teacher conferences, asking parents to return permission slips for fieldtrips) and children's developmental outcomes (e.g., discussing a child's social development, school readiness). Similarities found in both programs may be reflective of the similar educational backgrounds and teaching experiences of the teachers in both schools, as well as very similar populations (i.e., children and families in neighboring communities) being served.

Although exploratory in nature, the results from this study are encouraging for continued research aimed at identifying factors that encourage and facilitate positive home-school partnerships that effectively meet the needs of diverse groups of families. Several significant differences between the two programs were identified in terms of the method and nature of parent involvement contacts. Teachers in the home visitation program made a significantly higher proportion of parent contacts through home visitation than those in the center based model. Although teachers at both programs frequently used written notes as a means to contact families, teachers in the family center model used notes significantly more than teachers in the home visitation program. These findings provide an indication that families in the home visitation program have more chances to meet with teachers. These families also volunteered significantly more in school events and visited classrooms significantly more than the families of children enrolled in the family center model. Although direct causal relationships cannot be assumed, these findings suggest that the home visitation component of the program helped parents feel more comfortable to actively involve themselves in the education-related activities.

Findings also indicated that significantly more contacts focused on relationship building were made between teachers and families in the family center based model compared to those in the home visitation model. One possible explanation for this difference revolves around the nature of home visitation programs. Teachers in this program regularly visit families of enrolled children in their homes (a minimum of four times for each child's family during the school year). It can be assumed that these teachers are able to build and maintain rapport with family members as a result of these home visits, thus freeing them to focus on other issues when having contact and/or interacting with them. Teachers in the family center model on the other hand do not have these continuous opportunities for relationship building, and thus must spend time on this issue as part of most contacts with families.

Significant differences emerged between the two programs when exploring who initiated parental involvement contacts. Teachers in the home visitation program initiated a significantly higher proportion of contacts with families than teachers in the family center program. This suggests that teachers in the home visitation program reach out to families more than those in the other program. In contrast, parents in the family center model initiated a significantly higher proportion of the contacts with teachers than parents in the home visitation program. It was beyond the scope of this study to explore whether all families had equal chances of contacts with schools. It could be assumed that when teachers reach out to families, they would make efforts to provide all the families with somewhat equal opportunities of contacts with schools. However, when families initiate contacts more than teachers, it is more likely that only selected and/or motivated families would initiate contacts. Future research in this area will need to explore whether all families have similar contacts with schools and what types of home-school partnership initiatives lead to different outcomes.

Findings from the open-ended items on the questionnaire indicated that teachers at both sites saw the major benefits of involving parents as empowerment and increased level of parent responsibility. It is worth noting that a majority of the teachers considered "parent outcomes" rather than "child outcomes" as being the primary benefactor of parent involvement in early childhood programs. These findings are in line with the recent trend of putting the emphasis of parent involvement on desirable adult outcomes as well as children's developmental outcomes. At the same time, many teachers also saw support and encouragement for children's learning, and conveying to children that school is important as benefits. This indicates that children's learning and developmental outcomes are still considered as an important focus of parent involvement. Teachers also noted improved learning at school and better understanding of children on teachers' part as benefits of parent involvement. These findings indicate that teachers not only see the benefits for parents and children, but also the benefits schools experience (e.g., improved learning) from positive home-school partnerships. This indicates teachers believe that all parties involved (parents, children, and school) benefit from such partnerships.

Teachers at both sites identified parents' work schedule and lack of time as the most significant barrier to parent involvement. This finding is consistent with earlier research on the barriers to parent involvement in early childhood programs (McBride & Lin, 1996). It indicates that teachers consider the major barriers to parent involvement lies within families rather than schools. Parents' lack of comfort and negative past school experience were also identified as common barriers. These findings support Epstein's (1987) life-course perspective of home-school partnerships in which prior experience and philosophies of families and schools are identified as factors that either push together or pull apart home-school partnerships.

Along with these common barriers to parent involvement identified by both teacher groups, there were differences worth noting. A relatively large proportion of teachers in the center based model saw a lack of transportation and logistical constraints (i.e., disconnected telephones, messages not reaching home from school) as major barriers to parent involvement, whereas only one teacher in the home visitation program identified such barriers. One possible explanation for this would be that teachers in the home visitation program did not see logistical constraints as barriers because they are able to visit families in their homes when there are problems such as disconnected phones. It might be a possible indication that home visitation has a potential to provide a way for parents to be involved even when logistical constraints may otherwise prevent such activities. Another difference which emerged was that a larger proportion of teachers in the home visitation program saw work overload on the part of school personnel as being a barrier to parent involvement. The home visitation component of the program may have added more work for these teachers even though they had one day per week for home visitation. Future research is needed which explores the costs (e.g., time, financial, etc.) and benefits of a home visitation model when compared to a center-based model, and possible ways to overcome and/or reduce these costs.

Finally, in terms of the factors that would encourage and facilitate parent involvement in early childhood programs, teachers at both sites identified the need for more dedicated time for planning and implementation of parent involvement activities. Most teachers expressed the need for setting aside time (i.e., one day per week) that would allow them to make more contacts with families. In addition, teachers at both sites indicated the need to have staff members whose primary job responsibility is developing parent involvement initiatives as a means overcoming many of the barriers to such involvement.

Due to the exploratory nature of the study and small sample size, generalizing the results to other programs implemented with other populations should be done with caution. However, the results from this study are encouraging for continued research and program development work in this area. In addition to the suggestions mentioned above, future studies will need to explore the impact of different types of home-school partnership initiatives on child outcomes and investigate what aspects of the initiatives lead to different outcomes.

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Parent Involvement in American Public Schools: A Historical Perspective 1642–2000

Diana Hiatt-Michael

Local Control and Parental Choice in Education

Historically, a child's education has always been seen by parents, and perhaps by society as a whole, as the purview of the child's parents. Parental education included, and still includes, activities related to discipline, basic skills, work skills, ethics, and value inculcation. These educational activities were carried out privately within the family, rather than publicly through the use of public institutions (Berger, 1981). A child's secondary education was typically acquired through trade apprenticeships arranged by the child's parents rather than through extensive public education in secondary schools.

During the early years in America, the colonies were granted local control of education (Pulliam, 1987). The first schools were created by religious leaders and later placed under governance of townships. Under townships, boards were comprised of lay citizens, who were parents in the community. As many immigrants had left Europe in order to openly practice their religious beliefs, these schools represented the religious beliefs of the community. Religion, reading, and writing comprised the curriculum for these schools. Since each colony was founded by a different religious sect and most colonies soon had more than one sect, colonial America was dotted with many small schools representing the religious view of the parental lay board.

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Many schools were also organized along social class; this was especially so for the plantation states which attempted to emulate the class structure of Britain. The upper class and growing middle class created schools which catered to the social demands of these parents. These schools were supported by fees paid by parents. In response to concerns of philanthropists, charity schools were organized to provide rudimentary education to children who could not afford fees. In brief, the American scene in elementary education was one of local parental control of school governance, parental support of curriculum, parental choice of teachers, and parental support of religious teachings of the school.

However, as public education developed in America, parent involvement in education changed. To many, it seems parents have lost control over their children's education. Public educational institutions usurped and supplanted this parental function, some say, to the detriment of the children and the family. Recognizing this during the late twentieth century, many parents, as well as businessmen, politicians, and educators, began to express renewed concern about choice and parent involvement in public education as a possible option to what many see as an outmoded and ineffective public education system. A spate of national task force reports, epitomized by *A Nation at Risk* (Gardener, 1983), reiterated the rising need to connect the child's home life with school expectations. These reports expressed the importance of parent involvement in a child's school life.

What caused the apparent separation between the child's parents and schooling? Answering this question is the focus of this historical examination of parent involvement in American public schooling.

The Emergence of American Public Education

The late sixteenth and early seventeenth century was a fertile period of exploration of ideas concerning the social contract and public education as espoused by Locke, Rousseau, and others (Spring, 1986). Perhaps as a result, the shift from parent education to public education occurred first in Europe and then was transmitted to America.

During this period, in the North American colonies under British rule, local colonial authorities had jurisdiction over education. Separated from their mother country, the new colonies responded directly to local needs. For example, as early as 1642, Massachusetts colony, the leading colony regarding educational issues, passed a law which required all parents to provide their children with education in reading, religion, and a trade. When local leaders observed that some parents were not teaching their children to read, they pressed for a law which mandated that all towns of 50 inhabitants or more hire a teacher who could be paid out of local funds.

However, it was not until the Revolutionary War era that the sustained support for tax-supported universal education is reported (Pulliam, 1987). In the eighteenth century many American leaders, such as Benjamin Rush and George Washington, advocated national elementary education supported by federal or state taxes. In particular, Thomas Jefferson (1779/1961) eloquently argued for public education for all children in the Commonwealth of Virginia. His argument was that America's citizens required certain basic skills in order to function in a democratic society. These skills included reading, writing, and rhetoric. Because most of America's European immigrants did not possess such skills, and were, therefore, incapable of properly educating their own children in them, Jefferson stated that Virginia should provide public schooling for every child. He believed that citizens required the ability to read the printed word and communicate clearly in both oral and written form in order to be free to make rational decisions in the community and nation. He feared that uninformed citizens could easily become pawns of political activists. His bill supported three years of public schooling under local control. However, his notion of universal public elementary education was not supported by the legislators of Virginia. They preferred to allow parents individual choice of private and religious schools rather than support public schools.

In nineteenth century America, Jefferson's view of universal public education with equal educational opportunity for every child regardless of ability to pay captured the sentiment of the American public and polity. DeTocqueville (1835/1946) noted after a nineteenth century visit to America, "There reigns an unbelievable outward equality in America." This apparent value placed on equality among the classes noted during the late colonial period continued as the nation developed. The eloquent voices of educational reformers were heard throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century in support of public education and equality of opportunity. In the mid-1800s, the leadership of Horace Mann and Henry Barnard was notable. Mann's vision of the common school led to the development of a public school system in almost every state by 1860.

However, as analyzed by noted historian Lawrence Cremin in *Transformation of the American School,* it was the public school administrators who crafted the public school system of the twentieth century. Their work rested on the belief that public schooling provided the forum in which all the diverse elements of America's native and immigrant society acquired a common culture. Their efforts were exemplified by William Torrey Harris, Superintendent of St. Louis Public Schools and later U. S.

Commissioner of Education. Faced with ever-increasing student enrollments, he met this rising demand for schools with scientifically-managed, graded elementary and secondary schools. John Dewey, an early twentieth century philosopher, captured continuing interest in his "progressive" community schools, a concept which rested on public schooling. His beliefs were modified by Ralph W. Tyler, who fervently expounded free universal public schooling, providing the major influence on all students throughout the 1900s. As late as the mid-twentieth century, many supported the egalitarian Jeffersonian model as one that would serve the educational desires of *all parents* for their children, not only that of the poor, minority, and immigrant population of the United States. By the second half of the nineteenth century, only a percentage of elementary children were educated in private schools. Most parents of lower, middle, and upper middle classes considered the graded public school to be the educational choice. Because children from all ethnic groups and social backgrounds attended the public schools, it appeared that public schools were providing the "melting pot" for the diverse cultures of America.

However, the opposing view, differential educational opportunity or public school choice, appears in recent years to have attracted a strong following. Supporters of this view believe that choice relates to greater parent involvement in the kind of education their children receive. These proponents support differential education not only among America's moneyed intellectual and business elite, who have always preferred private education for their children, but also increasingly among the rising middle class who are the product of what is now seen by many as an outmoded and ineffective public education system. Therein lies the source of the tension and friction between the advocates of free universal public education and the proponents for parental school choice.

The Press for Compulsory Education and Child Labor Laws

Pre-Revolutionary educational practices and trends tended to be on a state-by-state basis during the Revolutionary period under the Articles of Confederation and along the lines of colonial Massachusetts where, for example, educational practices continued to evolve along new and broader patterns of public instruction. Under the Constitution of the post-Revolutionary United States, the responsibility for the education of each state's citizens has been reserved to the individual state or to the people.

The watershed year 1852 marks the passage of America's first compulsory education law in Massachusetts. Gradually, other states followed

Massachusetts' lead. However, as late as 1885, only sixteen out of the then 38 states had similar compulsory education laws.

During the nineteenth century, hordes of unemployed immigrant children were pressed by their parents into the mines, mills, and factories of the industrial revolution in order to supplement the family's subsistence wages (Rippa, 1988). The family needed the money to survive. Likewise on the family farm, parents needed child labor for planting and harvesting crops, tending the farm animals, and a host of other survival chores. Consequently, parents had little or no motivation and could ill afford economically to send their children to school.

As a result of this exploitation of low-wage child labor, the labor market was glutted with cheap labor. The primary political pressure to change this situation came from the working men who formed labor unions and went on strike for higher wages. In order for such strikes to be successful, labor unions enlisted politicians to enact child labor laws. These laws limited an industrialist's ability to exploit the labor of children.

However, these laws alone proved insufficient to keep children out of the workplace and gangs of unemployed urban children ran the city streets creating havoc. Compulsory school attendance and truancy laws were needed in addition to force parents to relinquish their children's wages. By 1918, all states had passed such legislation (Rippa, 1988). These laws made it illegal for a parent to keep a child out of school without the permission of school authorities and carried stiff fines for noncompliance. To further assure compliance, names of new immigrants were reported to school authorities by immigration authorities. Such laws spelled the death knell for parent involvement and control over their children's education.

Children were required to attend public schools for increasingly longer periods of time. This lengthy institutionalization of children was camouflaged by reformers who argued the advantages of public education for the betterment of society. To this end, coercion of students into classrooms was condoned. Others supported the compulsory education and truancy laws because of fear of large numbers of unsupervised, unemployed immigrant children who roamed the streets. This fear is exemplified in this district superintendent's comment:

> Citizens should support compulsory education to save themselves from the rapidly increasing herds of non-producers . . . to save themselves from the wretches who prey upon society like wild beasts. For such children, the state should establish labor schools so that children can be taught not only how to read but how to work (Tyack, 1974).

The Development of School Bureaucratization and Professionalization of Teachers

The bureaucratization of the American educational system emerged as a result of four combined forces—the growing American population, the growth of the industrial centers, the urbanization of the nation, and the utilization of scientific management techniques in business and industry. Bureaucratization is commonly defined as the formation of a hierarchical organization of an institution with defined procedures, roles, and functions of personnel. The early American schools were generally large single-room, multi-age schoolhouses organized and operated by the locally hired teacher. In 1848, the first graded elementary school was opened in Massachusetts. This new organization represented the factory model of schooling and utilized a graded curriculum. The teacher in each classroom focused on content assigned to that grade. Children were classified by grade. The haphazard individualized instruction of early schooling was replaced with an efficient systems approach to specialized curriculum for each grade. The graded school concept spread across states where it was quickly adopted in all modern schools in response to the increasing numbers of children in urban areas (Cremin, 1961).

In conjunction with the graded school plan, many teachers were required to staff each school and the office of principal was added for efficient management of the school's operation. The increased numbers of schools within a town led to the formation of the superintendent's position, a role developed to assure uniformity across schools.

Mann and Barnard were instrumental leaders in the mid-1800s for the bureaucratization of public schools and the professionalization of faculty. Their intent was to bring the scientific management of the industrial age to the education of children. They recommended processes of standardization and systemization so that the growing public schools could operate effectively in the industrialized society. Mann promoted professional education of teachers in normal schools. Both men supported the notion that education of children should be in the hands of the professional teacher and administrator. Their belief was that parents did not possess the time, knowledge, or talents necessary for a child to meet the challenges of the emerging technology. Therefore, the parent should turn over the process of education to professionals hired by the state.

Barnard argued for the reduction of lay control of public schools. Instead of schools directly reporting to financial boards, Barnard felt that there should be general state financial support for public schooling. As Commissioner of Education in the states of Rhode Island and Connecticut, Barnard worked with evangelical fervor to increase state control and reduce local control of schools.

The developing bureaucratization of schools was intended to make the operation more equitable. For example, teachers and administrators would be hired on professional qualifications rather than on personal favoritism or nepotism. However, the stress on equity and systems management increased layers of bureaucracy. These layers separated the parents from the daily decision-making operations of the educational process. The control of schools by lay parent boards was subsumed by school superintendents. Boards of Education evolved into figureheads who were manipulated by the professional superintendent. Davies (1992) commented that the "Professionalism of administrators and teachers led to keeping parents out of power influence." Michael Katz (1975), as part of his analysis of control of education, stated:

> Development of more elaborate and specific written regulations was intended to make the operation of the school system more routine, that is, more impartial and equitable, and the removal of the school board from ward politics was designed to remove the schools from partisanship as well as to foster increased coordination through centralization. It offered specific advantages to practicing schoolmen in their quest for professionalism.

Professionalization may be defined as the process by which the administrators of the bureaucracy credential themselves and those practitioners who might seek a license to practice under the bureaucracy. During the twentieth century the requirements to become a teacher changed from graduation from a secondary school to graduation from a five-year approved college program (Tyler, 1992). The normal schools, considered quality professional education in the 1800s, were gradually absorbed by colleges. By 1900, one-quarter of four-year colleges offered professional training in education. States began to require licensing of teachers to assure quality control. Teachers were required to be part of the best educated. In this professional education of teachers, teachers acquired shared standards of professional practice. The continued press for more education for teachers separated the social and cultural level of the teacher from that of the school's parents in many communities and urban centers. Shipman (1987) reported that lower class parents were hesitant to enter schools because schools belonged to the middle and upper class professionals.

From the above, it is apparent that the educational system in the United States has gone through the process of bureaucratization and professionalization. However, bureaucratization of the educational system and increased professionalization of teachers have reduced parental influence in public schooling. The bureaucracy controls the schools, and parents feel powerless over this overwhelming system. The system controls governance, daily administration, curriculum content, and hiring faculty. In addition, the professionalization of faculty separates the teacher from the parent, placing the role of "expert" upon the teacher and administrator.

Parental Challenges to Public School Bureaucracy

The Development of the Parent/Teacher Association

The increasing separation between parent control and public school was perceived by parents. Mothers sought intervention and formed the National Congress of Mothers (NCM) in 1897. This group, comprised of middle and upper class mothers, met with teachers on Saturdays and expressed their concerns to the school principal through petitions. These mothers studied school curricula, became informed about child growth and development, and encouraged other parents to be active in the school. They were particularly active in securing public school kindergarten programs and health programs. The NCM worked for children and youth programs through national, state, and local volunteer units. The influence of this group spread rapidly and formed the basis of the Parent/Teacher Association (PTA) which is active on almost every American school site today. Butts and Cremin (1953) stated:

> Parent-Teacher Associations grew by leaps and bounds, and in a few communities even the student began to be listened to with more appreciation and respect as the notion of a "community school" began to capture the imagination and loyalty of those members of the professional and the public who were genuinely devoted to improving the school.

The PTA helped to "Americanize newcomers to the country and to teach middle class parenting" (Davies, 1992). This group connected the home and school during the first part of the twentieth century. By the 1940s, parents of all social classes considered the monthly PTA meeting a mandatory community event.

Court Challenges

During the last three decades of the twentieth century, parents increasingly have resorted to courts in order to effect changes within the bureaucracy of the public schools. These parents began to hammer at the public school monolith, created by a century of increasing school bureaucracy. They were joined by social reformers. Their concerted efforts were loud and demanding. Rivlin (1964) remarked that:

> As parents became more enlightened with more education they became more vocal in their demands as to what schools should offer. The parents of American school children are increasingly vocal. It is to be expected that parents who hear the spectacular charges that are made by critics of education should wonder why changes are not made in the way schools are run.

Parents became involved in legal battles which focused on equality of educational opportunities (Wirt & Kirst, 1975). In a landmark court case, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka,* the court ruled that separate schools for black and white children were not providing equality of educational opportunity. This ruling led to several desegregation cases in major cities such as Boston, Detroit, and Los Angeles, which forced public schools to reorganize student populations to reflect ethnic diversity. *Serrano v. Priest,* a suit involving Serrano, a public school parent, resulted in a decision ordering state-wide equalization of school funding. *Lau v. Nichols* promoted bilingual education programs so that non-English speaking students equally benefited from public education. The ruling on *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* led to legislation for equal access for handicapped children.

Development of Parent Involvement Programs

In conjunction with court rulings, parent involvement was assisted by the diligent labors of educational researchers whose studies pointed out the positive influence parent involvement and parent education had upon student achievement in schools. This knowledge was incorporated into educational legislation, which mandated parent involvement components. The first federally funded legislation, namely Project Head Start in 1964 for disadvantaged children in the inner cities and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, required that parents serve on school advisory boards and participate in classroom activities. Education for All Handicapped Act in 1974 required parents be an active partner in determining their child's educational program. Each handicapped student was to have an individually developed program. This program was to be developed by teacher, parent, child, and specialists. Parents had to initiate the child's entrance and exit from the program.

Following the development of Head Start programs, there was increased growth in early childhood education programs for all social classes. This increase was directly related to increased numbers of mothers, single and married, participating in the workforce outside the home while their children were still very young. Information generated by Head Start and other federally funded research studies promoted parent involvement in these programs. Forms of parent involvement included serving on advisory boards, acting as a teacher assistant in the classroom, participating in school events, working in the school office and other related school activities, and participating in parent education classes. The early childhood programs encouraged an open dialogue between the professional teacher and the parent. Many policymakers of the 1990s advocate that the model of parent involvement developed in early childhood programs be emulated in the elementary and secondary schools (Tyler, 1992).

Home Schooling

In response to desegregation rulings, school districts created plans publicly to transport children from neighborhood schools in order to create ethnically diverse schools. Many parents became so enraged with this situation that they removed their children from public schools and enrolled them in private schools, created new schools, or began home schooling. Home schooling, ardently advocated by John Holt in the 1970s, has become a powerful parental involvement outcome of the desegregation movement (Fantini, 1987). Armed with knowledge of court cases and parents' rights over their child's education, these parents are teaching their children at home (Millard, 1989). In many states, the parents work under the auspices of a licensed public school teacher. Although the number of home schoolers is small in comparison to public school students, federal reports indicate that their numbers are rapidly increasing (Davies, 2000).

School Restructuring and Site-based Management

School restructuring, a major movement expressed in educational literature and professional addresses, commenced in the mid-1980s. This movement may open the doors of all public schools to increased parent involvement. School restructuring advocates site-based management, in which school districts return control to school sites. Each school is to have a governing board whose membership must include a majority of local school parents. This governing board would determine curriculum, create budgets, hire faculty, and organize the school facilities, students, and faculty. This movement holds promise to restore local parental control. Funds to support the development of school restructuring have been provided by many states.

Summary

The pendulum has swung from strong parent involvement in the home and community based schools of the agrarian seventeenth century to the bureaucratic factory model schools of the industrial revolution. The pendulum appears to be swinging back again, slowly at first, but gathering momentum, towards schooling which increasingly involves parents. This movement will reflect the effects of the emerging culture based on information technology and telecommunications on the lives of children, parents, and schools. Parent involvement has emerged in the 1900's as a major issue in public schooling and one that affects the diverse aspects of American education such as school organization, goverance, school finance, curriculum, and teacher education. Goals 2000 (1994) included parent involvement as one of eight national goals and includes research funding for Family, School, Community Partnerships at John Hopkins University and at the Office for Educational Research.

At present a tension often exists between professionals, on the one hand, who espouse the concept that they alone are qualified to make complex decisions affecting the education of our nation's children, and parents, on the other hand, who believe that they should have a voice in their children's compensatory public education. Cutler (2000) reported that between 1991 and 1999, thirty-five states passed laws approving charter schools, schools that involve parents in all aspects of school decision-making. In addition, three states have supported parental choice in the form of voucher plans and others are considering various forms of school vouchers. The 1990s witnessed other open forums for dialogue between the two groups, such as site-based management meetings, development of school-based parent centers and home-schooling contracts. Such forums will provide opportunities to bridge the gap between the two groups and create new ways for parents and public school professionals to interact. Collaboration among the various constituencies is critical to mutual understanding and support between the school and home, as interdependent not independent entities.

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Relationship, The Fourth "R": The Development of a Classroom Community

Nancy Meltzoff

The Development of a Classroom Community

"My name is Elga Brown. You can call me Elga. You can call me Elga Brown. You can call me teacher if you forget my name. Some people call me Grandma if they forget my name. I don't mind that. I'm one of the teachers here. Do you know how many teachers we have in this class?"

I gathered on the floor with 21 children and their assorted relatives, on this very important day in the lives of each person in the room—the first day of kindergarten. We sat there, like loose skeins of yarn, about to participate in the creation of a weaving, about to begin the process of forming a classroom community. I was there in the role of participant observer, with the hope of discovering how Elga Brown nurtured the development of a classroom community over the course of a school year.

Teachers are being recognized as "community-builders," rather than as conduits for information. Richard Prawat (1992) states that if we agree that learning is a social act, "the criteria for judging teacher effectiveness shifts from that of delivering good lessons to that of being able to build or create a classroom 'learning community'" (p. 13). In order to be participating citizens, our children must learn how to be both strong individuals and members of communities. Kevin Ryan and Thomas Lickona (1987) state that if our society is to grow and develop, young people "must learn to function as part of an increasingly complex world community, where global peace and justice demand ever increasing levels of cooperation" (p. 3). Indeed, the act of teaching children to function

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in this way can influence the character of our society. The quality of social life can improve as the social character of each individual develops. The quality of our schooling can also improve as students learn to be part of a classroom community (Bruner, 1996; Nieto, 1999).

In education, as in our society, individualism is the dominant value orientation. However, as Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1985) point out, interest in commitment and community is increasing in the public sphere as people recognize the interconnectedness of environmental, political, and social systems. At the same time, social reformers are calling for a new concept of the "public good." The concepts of cooperation and conflict resolution have moved to the forefront of concern. As children participate in an elementary school classroom community, they receive guided practice in relationship skills necessary for active involvement in both the private and public spheres.

A Metaphorical Understanding of the Classroom Community

Although life in the classroom is a social experience, it does not necessarily constitute a community. Teachers have certain images of their classrooms; they are guided by a metaphorical understanding of teaching, learning, and ideas. Goerge Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980), coauthors of *Metaphors We Live By*, explain that ". . . the concepts that govern our thought are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning" (p. 3). Since our conceptual system is metaphorical, metaphor helps constitute our reality. Although sometimes this understanding is beneath the level of awareness, we can determine the teacher's conceptual framework through an examination of actual classroom practice. For instance, Lakoff explains, if teachers perceive ideas as "locations," and thinking as "moving" from one place to another, the role of the teacher is then perceived as guide, one who opens doors, and who serves as a travel agent or tour leader. If teachers believe that ideas are objects, teaching is seen as the transference of knowledge. Ideas are "sent" from the teacher to the learner through a conduit (Reddy, 1979). If knowledge is "seeing," the teacher "shows" students the right path. Another metaphor for ideas is the food metaphor, where ideas are food that is "spoon fed" to students. If the mind is perceived as a body, teachers must provide "exercises" to strengthen and train the mind. Similarly, in the "mind as machine" metaphor, we "fine tune" the students' comprehension.

Each of these generative metaphors gives rise to a corresponding view of the classroom. The factory model, which focuses on student-as-product, control, accountability, standardization, efficiency, and a hierarchical style of management, has dominated public school education during the twentieth century. As Edward Fiske (1992) states, "public schools are nineteenth-century institutions because they were organized around an industrial model that prevailed at the turn of the century" (p. 25). This metaphorical understanding of the classroom experience de-emphasizes the social aspects of learning and teaching.

An alternate metaphor that can guide our understanding of the classroom experience is that of weaving, where each individual strand interacts with others to form an integrated whole. The beauty of the weaving is created by the relationships of the strands, one to another. Relationship, in some form, is involved in all teaching and learning, with many of these relationships negotiated by the students. Interactions between students and other students, between teachers and students, and between students and texts or other curricular materials constitute most of the learning that occurs in classrooms. The weaving metaphor emphasizes the relational aspects of the teaching and learning process. The view of the classroom as a community is a natural outgrowth of the metaphorical understanding of learning as the weaving of related elements into patterns. Philosopher Maxine Greene (1995), states, "In thinking of community, we need to emphasize the process words: making, creating, weaving, saying, and the like" (p. 39).

Relationship is integral to the classroom community, and as such, is the fourth 'R' in our schools. Attention to relationship facilitates the learning of all topics and concepts students are expected to learn. Ideas are the outgrowth of recognition of patterns of relationships and teaching is an interactive process. Certain phrases highlight this understanding of teaching and learning. For instance, "Are you with me?" acknowledges the feeling of connection when one person understands another.

The Strands of a Classroom Community

Many reformers have called for an emphasis upon interconnectedness (Bateson, 1979; Berman, 1981; Bowers, 1987; Etzioni, 1987; O'Sullivan, 1999; Sullivan, 1982), the development of learning communities (Baloche, 1998; Burke-Hengen & Gillespie, 1995; Greene, 1995; Johnson, 1987; Kohn, 1996; Oakes & Lipton, 1999; Palmer, 1998; Prawat, 1992; Raywid, 1988; Ryan & Lickona, 1987), inclusive, multicultural communities (Gibbs, 1995; Hooks, 1994; Nieto, 1999; Paley, 1995; Sapon-Shevin, 1995), democratic classroom communities (Ayers, 1995; Freire, 1987; Meier, 1995; Wolk, 1998), caring classroom communities (Noddings, 1992; Peterson, 1992) and cooperative learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Kagan, 1992). Each of these informs us as we learn to develop the classroom community. A classroom community is built on relationships, guided by the teacher, and develops in a synergistic context of culture, school district, school, staff members, teacher, parents, and students. Although not all teachers can depend on a fully supportive atmosphere, they can move toward the development of a classroom community in a variety of contexts. The process for developing community in the classroom is not fixed, nor is community-building an all-or-nothing proposition. The more elements of a community that are incorporated into the classroom, the richer the pattern in the weaving.

Prawat (1992) chronicles the movement in education from emphasis on individual differences to the creation of schoolwide and classroom learning communities. He states that, ". . . figuring out how to accomplish these goals is a task that could engage the productive energies of teachers and researchers well into the next century" (p. 13). My ethnographic study specifically addressed this question—how is a classroom community developed?

Ten strands of a classroom community were identified through following the development of community in one kindergarten during the course of one school year (Meltzoff, 1990). The examples of community-building events herein are drawn from this classroom community, located in Eugene, Oregon. I chose a kindergarten class for this study since the students had few preconceived notions about "public school," and so were able to participate in this communitarian environment without self-consciousness and resistance fueled by expectations. The teacher, Elga Brown, was a gentle and strong 20-year veteran who had earned a reputation as an outstanding teacher. She maintained that development of a classroom community was of utmost importance. Although these strands are presented separately in this paper, in practice they are interwoven. Each strand affects the others, and an internal balance and harmony evolves as the unique community grows. The ten foundational strands—shared leadership, responsiveness, communication, shared ethics, cooperation as a social process, shared history, shared environment, commitment, wholeness, and interdependence—are reviewed below.

I participated in the activities of the classroom throughout one entire school year, watching Elga carefully construct the physical environment before school started, and then attending class on an average of two or three times per week. Through numerous informal and formal interviews with the teacher, classroom assistant, parents, and children, and examining extensive audio taped observations, I pieced together Elga's conscious and careful process of community building. Elga also participated in the research process by reading all research drafts and by reflecting on her own work with the students.

Shared Leadership

Shared leadership is one of the more obvious characteristics of a classroom community. Teachers and students share "ownership" of the space, time, language, and curricular content of the class.

"Do you know how many teachers we have in this class?" asked Elga on the first day, a twinkle in her eye.

Most of the students counted the adults in the room. One student guessed two, and another three.

"Would you like to meet all the teachers?" Elga asked. "Are you ready? You're going to be surprised! Watch me—I'm going to introduce them to you. My name is Elga Brown. (She placed her hand on the shoulder of the child seated next to her.) This is Steve. He's one of the teachers here. This is Jean. She's a teacher. I'll bet sometimes Jean's mom will be a teacher here." Elga continued around the circle, introducing each person present. "We're all teachers here. Who do you think are the learners?"

"All of us!" called out one excited boy.

Thus, within moments of the start of school, Elga had framed shared teaching and learning. In an atmosphere of shared leadership, democracy can flourish; children truly participate in decision-making and problem-solving. A skilled teacher can frame the teaching-learning experience so that students are aware of their rights and responsibilities as members of the shared learning environment.

Berlak and Berlak (1981), in analyzing the extent of control in the classroom, named four "control dilemmas." These include control of time, control of what children do and how they do it (operations), and control of evaluation (standards). In a classroom community characterized by shared leadership, there is strong evidence of shared control of operations and of responsibility for learning.

Communication

Since learning is interaction, students need to learn relationship skills. These skills not only help them as they engage in direct negotiation with other people, but also as they interact with people indirectly through the printed word and other forms of communication. The role of the student is one of reaching out, of actively receiving. Therefore, two of the major strands of a classroom community are communication and responsiveness. As teachers encourage children to be responsive and to communicate clearly, they make it possible for the children to participate in a community, to have a voice. Maxine Greene (1995) emphasizes that "the renewal of a common world. . . may come into being in the course of a continuing dialogue (p. 196)" and that "the challenge is to make possible the interplay of multiple voices" (p. 198).

Communication includes literacy skills, conversation skills, and formalized verbal interactions. It also involves interactions that are nonverbal. For example, specific communication skills that have particular relevance to young children are: literacy skills; turn-taking in spoken dialogue; learning to say no and to set personal boundaries; learning the importance of expressing and accepting feelings and doing so in a safe and appropriate manner.

In Elga's class, the "talking and listening chairs" serve as physical aids for oral communication skills, and for resolving conflict. Young students can learn to speak when in the "talking chair" and to listen when in the "listening chair." The children were introduced to the labeled chairs on September 28, when two girls experienced difficulty sharing wallets and calendars in the playhouse. After Elga explained how to use the chairs, the two girls sat in them.

"There you go, now tell her what the problem was," Elga said.

"Well, if you took the wallet then I would have two calendars and you would have a wallet and a calendar," Anne said.

Diane started to talk, but Elga said, "Oops! Now get up and trade chairs. When you're in the listening chair you can only listen."

The girls switched positions, and Diane spoke. "The other one doesn't have a calendar in it, it has something else in it."

"Can you get up and trade places with Anne?" Elga said.

The girls changed places and Anne offered a solution. "Well, um, I don't think there's another wallet. How about we can take turns," Anne suggested.

As they shift positions, the children learn concretely what it means to take turns in a dialogue. "It gives them a procedure to learn to use and then they can transfer that procedure just about anywhere," Elga said of the system.

Responsiveness

Communication is intricately intertwined with responsiveness, another strand in the weaving of community. Etzioni (1987) identifies the "responsive community," wherein members are responsive to the needs of both the "I" and the "we," the individual and the group. In addition, I believe that members of a community must be responsive to the needs of the environment within which they exist. Thus, there are three aspects of responsiveness in the classroom community—to the "I," to the "we," and to the environment. In a classroom community, children learn to pay attention to what works for the group as a whole as well as for individual members. Nel Noddings (1992) describes an ethic of care as a "needs-and response-based ethic...based on the recognition of needs, relation, and reponse" (p. 21). This level of consciousness gives rise to a situation where the "whole is greater than the sum of its parts."

The following interaction is an example of Elga encouraging a child to be responsive to the needs of others.

The children were signing up for their day's work—one activity for "first turn" and one for "second turn." Danielle wanted to play with the block towers, which required two players. Elga addressed Steve, an only child who was accustomed to making decisions based on his own desires. "Anybody who'd like to be Danielle's first turn block tower partner? Would you, Steve?"

"Well, I'll have to change my turns if I do that," answered Steve, characteristically focusing on his own needs.

"Could you do that?" Elga asked. "Could you change your turns?"

"Well . . ." Steve paused, "of course!"

"Oh my goodness, Steve, really! How wonderful! That's terrific!" Elga responded. The other children laughed in surprise, as Steve had never displayed flexibility before. Elga continued to praise him, saying, "Steve, you are learning new things! It's wonderful!"

Shared Ethics

A classroom community is characterized by shared ethics. This means that members of a community share values and beliefs about the common good, and work towards common goals for the group. The adults in a classroom community encourage children's personal and interpersonal moral growth. Henry Johnson (1987) proposes that human beings need membership in a morally sensitive community. Without such a commitment, people suffer from dehumanization, feelings of estrangement, and even fear of life. Members of a community will be able to articulate the group's shared norms and values and will engage in reaching and living a moral consensus. In other words, members of a moral community know what is "right" and they know that other members of the group accept the same guidelines. Nel Noddings (1992) warns, however, that we must be reflective about our communities. "We want people to be able to resist the demands of the community for conformity or orthodoxy, and we also want them to remain within the community, accepting its binding myths, ideas, and commitments" (p. 118). Indeed, we want our students to identify shared beliefs with other members of the community while maintaining respect and regard for diverse voices.

Shared ethics in a classroom community is inclusive of the feminine perspective of morality and justice, as articulated by Brabek (1987), Eisenberg (1982), Noddings (1987, 1992), and others. Brabek (1987) states that the feminists' goal for education is " . . . to transform education in the direction of development of the ability to sustain human relationships based on what Jane Roland Martin calls the 3 C's: care, concern, and connection, and ultimately, to create a social order that will not tolerate any group holding power to determine or limit the sovereignty of any other group" (p. 166).

In short, caring is a value that pervades. In Elga's class, the phrase that summed up her moral stance for the children was, "Everyone gets to feel safe and comfortable and do their important work." This far-reaching but clear phrase helped the children focus upon that which was considered morally correct in the classroom.

"The question, 'What makes you comfortable?' is an on-going exploration," Elga explained. "You can say to children, 'Everyone gets to feel safe and comfortable,' but comfortable is a very abstract term, so the whole year is spent defining those terms. Is this safe? Is this comfortable for that person? Would it be comfortable for you? Learning to think about events in that way is how children grow, rather than for me to tell them, that his is not done, or you can't do that, or I won't let you do this. However, I am ultimately responsible. It is my job to make sure that this place is safe and comfortable."

Alfie Kohn (1991) identifies different approaches to changing behaviors and attitudes, crystallized by questions children might ask. They are: "What am I supposed to do? What will happen to me if I don't do it? What kind of person do I want to be? How do we want our classroom (or school) to be?" The final question illuminates the concept that, "the idea is not just to internalize good values *in* a community but to internalize, among other things, the value *of* community."

Cooperation

Cooperation is an obvious indicator of shared ethics. Children who are cooperating demonstrate the ability to behave in ways that further the welfare of others (Eisenberg, 1982; Noddings, 1987). They are generous, helpful, kind, and compassionate. In Elga's classroom community, the children were encouraged to behave cooperatively. They were instructed in the fine arts of winning and losing, sharing, helping, turn-taking, and befriending. Elga set up situations in the classroom which forced the children to negotiate with one another. For instance, there were two playhouses, and only one set of dishes. When children were playing in both playhouses, they had to confront the reality of "limited resources." Within this very realistic context, they learned that cooperation was necessary. In another example, the wooden block boxes could be carried to a building site, but it took two children to carry each box.

Although a strong child might be able to hoist one, the class rule was that a block box must be carried by two people. The physical act of carrying a heavy object with another person requires cooperation on a primary, physical level. Thus, the strands of moral unity and cooperation as a social process provide the community with a firm basis for the development of a cohesive group.

Shared Environment and Shared History

In a classroom community, members come together and co-create a unique version of reality. Their pasts, presents, and futures are intertwined. Through "shared practices of commitment" (Bellah, 1985), and the sharing of feelings and emotions in a non-threatening environment, the members of the community create a *shared environment* and a *shared history*. While the sharing of space and of the present is easily observed, the sharing of the past and the future is more subtle. Shared space is communal space, which is owned and utilized and cared for by all members of the community. Two examples of this are the reading corner, and large tables instead of individually "owned" desks. At clean-up time in Elga's class, all children were encouraged to sing the "clean-up song" (Clean-up, clean-up, everybody do their share . . .), and to put the room in order without focusing on who made which mess.

Through the telling of personal stories and dreams the past and future are brought to the group. The past continually joins the present as these stories, and a fresh supply of new tales, are told and retold. Traditions can be carried from the past in many forms. A regular topic of conversation was about the first day of school.

"Do you remember the first day of kindergarten?" Elga asked.

"I was kind of worried," a child answered.

"Me, too," another child added.

Hannah said, "I wanted to go home!"

In this discussion, the children recognized their history and shared the meaning of their experiences, thus defining both their own personal growth and their growth as a community. Individuals may bring traditions from their families to share with the group, and group traditions, rituals, and ceremonies evolve as the community grows and deepens.

Commitment

Commitment is central to community building. Members of the community are aware of the existence of the group, and they identify themselves as members. Poplin (1979) states, "Members of the moral community have a deep sense of belonging to a significant, meaningful group."

Members not only know that they are part of the community, they are actively involved in the workings of the group. Whether consciously or not, they are involved in group development. They form meaningful associations within the community, and they participate in group decision-making, rule-making, and problem-solving. For instance, students help formulate classroom rules and problem-solve solutions and consequences when rules have been broken. Activities such as class big-books, class banners, and projects shared with other classes help students become involved with the group and continue to identify with their class in a positive way. Class symbols and rituals are created and honored. This identification with the group evolves slowly, as the children become more and more comfortable with the others in the community and more and more comfortable with themselves as social beings.

An example of forming group identity is seen in the following interaction, where the children slowly worked out "rules" for group projects. On November 27, Judith and Jesse were making a castle with long blocks and cardboard cones. Danielle walked by and looked at what they were doing.

"You wanna help us?" asked Jesse.

"What's it called?" asked Danielle.

"It's a castle," said Jesse.

Danielle picked up a block and started to play. After some time, other children joined in. One child asked, "Who made it?"

"We started it, then people wanted to come help us 'cause it looked like so fun," answered Judith.

Alan constructed a portion of the castle that accidentally fell over and crashed another part of the castle. Jesse was quite unhappy and said, "I don't know if it's okay for Alan to stay."

"It's a group project," Alan responded.

Elga called a meeting of all the children who had worked on the block castle. Since Alan thought it was an "everybody project," he didn't feel that it was necessary to ask permission to join, while Jesse felt that Alan shouldn't have joined in without an invitation. The conflict brought out the need for the children to develop fair and consistent rules for group projects. Alan began to cry, stating, "I knew it was an all-person thing and you really hurt my feelings." These large group projects were a step on the way to identification with the entire group. Little by little, the children learned to extend their concept of "group" to include the entire classroom community. As bell hooks states, "...a feeling of community creates a sense that there is shared commitment and a common good that binds us" (p. 40).

Wholeness

In a related strand—*wholeness*—members of a community regard one another holistically. Berlak and Berlak (1981) identify as their first "control dilemma" the whole child vs. the child as student. That is, do we view the young person as a whole child or do we focus primarily on intellectual and cognitive development? Certainly, in a classroom community, the child is seen as a whole, many-faceted person—physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual. However, there is more to wholeness than this; it is also concerned with the respect afforded to community members. In a moral community, people view one another as "whole persons who are of intrinsic significance and worth" (Poplin, 1979, p. 6).

The whole person is recognized as a complex individual self and as a social self. For this to happen, the children must learn social perspective-taking, which is, for many, an alien concept. For instance, Steve was encouraged to remember the other students in a good-natured manner when he was eager to answer a question.

"You are really good at thinking!" Elga said. "How come you can think about all this stuff and come up with all these great answers?"

"I'm really smart," he answered simply.

"I believe it. Do you know who else is really smart?" Elga asked.

A boy called out, "Joseph?"

"Look around," Elga suggested. "Look at *all* these really smart people. They're all really smart people." Thus, Elga effectively modeled respect and appreciation for individual talents and differences.

In order for the community to be strong, each member must have a positive self-concept, which allows the child to be independent and interdependent, competent working both alone and in a group. Individual expression is recognized and appreciated and children practice participating in the public discourse.

Interdependence

Finally, the strand of *interdependence* ties all of the other strands together. Members of a classroom community learn that their interdependence strengthens their interpersonal bonds and their social structure. As they learn to be interdependent, the children learn to adjust their own behavior in response to the others in the group. They begin to recognize that their ways of being affect others and that the social process of cooperation can be part of everything they do.

All of these strands intertwine and interconnect as the group acquires a sense of community. As Elga said, "At the beginning of the year, there isn't a community yet. The community that they come from is home. And so everybody is a loose little molecule buzzing around here. And then the connections start being made . . . as they make connections within the group, a community structure begins to develop."

In a strong community, members must be both independent and interdependent. Individual expression is recognized and appreciated and children practice participating in the public discourse. Although each person has a voice, a learning community is not a utopian free-for-all. Communities are highly complex places, where there may be conflict or confusion. This is not to say, however, that in learning communities, students do whatever they choose. A learning community has an intentional structure and a type of internal control that differs from the control evident in an autocratic classroom setting. Learning communities are carefully designed to give the students opportunities to practice skills of negotiation. What characterizes a learning community is how those complicated situations are handled by both children and adults. Although creating the setting for a learning community at the beginning of the year is difficult, the real challenge lies in maintaining it.

Each classroom community will be unique, with certain strands becoming thicker or more fully developed than others. Teachers, aware of their vital roles as guiding members of the community, can help encourage the growth of these strands through structuring of time and space, through class discussions and activities, and through modeling respectful interactions at all times. Since Elga knows what a classroom community "feels like," and can "recognize when it's happening," she can help the children as they learn to weave the strands of community.

The Classroom as a Hybrid Community

At this point, we must still question whether or not the existence of these strands constitutes a community. The term "community," meaning "common," usually refers to a community of place; that is, a community is a group of people that lives and works together. Over the past decades, the term "community" has been applied to other circumstances. Jacqueline Scherer (1972) identified the "hybrid" as one form of community that can be located in modern societies. The hybrid is "composed of institutions or organizations that adopt essential communal characteristics" (p. 119).

A classroom can be such a hybrid, a weaving together of elements of four types of communities. A classroom community is a hybrid of a traditional community of place, a moral community (Poplin, 1979), a responsive open community (Etzioni, 1987), and an institution (Goffman, 1961). This hybrid community may never reach full communal status, but it can be closer in practice to a community than it is to an institution.

In many ways, a classroom is like a traditional community of place. The members strive for effective communication skills. They experience a high degree of moral unity, evident in the prevalence of the social process of cooperation. However, since children live much of their lives away from the classroom, in some respects the classroom community is not like a community of place. Shared history and environment, identification, involvement, wholeness, and interdependence are strongly developed while the children are physically present in the classroom, but necessarily weaken as they leave the presence of community members and participate in other social structures.

The functioning classroom community is a moral phenomenon in that it is directed by essential values such as caring, sharing, and helping. These highly-valued moral ideals form a framework upon which social unity is built. As children learn skills of effective and sensitive interpersonal relations, they establish membership in the community, working towards the good of the group and creating a microcosm of the public good (Pereira, 1988). Thus, through participation in the moral community, members are entwined in an ever-expanding web of meaningful relationships that are characterized by genuine caring.

The hybrid community in the classroom is responsive to both the individual and to the group. Thus, both the person and the society are afforded moral standing. Individuation is nurtured, but not at the expense of the collective. The functioning classroom community is made up of strong individuals who are able to work together.

An important aspect of a classroom community is its institutional bearing. The nature of a classroom community is necessarily affected by the institution within which it develops. The school—a structure organized to perform the particular function of teaching children—provides the context for the classroom community. Although teacher, students, and parents in many self-contained classrooms enjoy a fair amount of autonomy, they are deeply embedded in the school, the district, the town or city, and the very cultures of the people involved. Thus, the classroom community is shaped by its socio-cultural context.

Although all of the strands, then, are affected by the context, certain strands are more affected by the institutional structure. If children are not permitted to influence the curricular context of the class, for instance, and if the class must follow a certain schedule each day, the strand of shared leadership is greatly affected. Thus, the particular nature of each classroom community is determined, in large part, by the school wherein it develops.

Summary

A classroom community such as Elga's develops in a synergistic context of culture, school district, school, staff members, teachers, and parents. Although not all teachers can depend on ideal circumstances, they can move towards the development of a classroom community in a variety of contexts. The strands of community are not fixed, nor is community-building an all-or-nothing proposition. The more strands incorporated into the classroom, the closer the members come to developing a community. As teachers—at all levels—develop classroom communities, additional strands may become evident.

Community-building is a viable and essential goal for all teachers. Our society needs to foster the growth of people who are skilled in personal and interpersonal relationships, as interpersonal moral development precedes civic virtue. In order to create communities that are inclusive of *all* people from all backgrounds and abilities, our citizens must learn to share leadership and power, to participate in decision-making and problem solving. Teachers must provide opportunities for students to express opinions and to communicate clearly in group settings. Students must practice working individually as well as in groups of varying sizes. If we long for healthy communities in a sustainable world, our citizens must cooperate with one another for the common good, and acknowledge our interdependence with the rest of the ecosystem. As children participate in communities in the context of schooling, they are given the opportunity to evolve as mature citizens, skilled in the intricacies of relational living.

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Minimal Parental Involvement

David J. Dwyer and Jeffrey B. Hecht

Causes Underlying Minimal Parent Involvement in the Education of Their Children

A school institutes a program that requires students to have their homework assignments initialed by their parents. The subsequent rate of completion of homework assignments increases, coupled with an increase of other academic indicators for these students. Another school faces a severe budget shortfall resulting in the elimination of many part-time positions, including classroom aides. The school responds by enacting a program to recruit and train parents as classroom helpers and tutors. Teachers work with volunteer parents to reduce student work-group size in classrooms without the need for additional expenditures. A third school exists in an area of the city troubled by youth gang activity. School personnel, community leaders, parents, and students come together in the school building at periodic meetings to discuss problems and reduce tensions. This school enjoys a continuing reduction in both student absentee rate and the rate of gang-related activity in or near the school.

All of these imaginary schools share a common image of schools successfully involving parents in the process of public education. For nearly three decades researchers have studied the various ways in which parents become involved in the education of their children. From 1966 to 1980 (Henderson, 1981), then on through the 1980's (Henderson, 1987), the plurality of research has shown that schools that engage in parent involvement programs tend to see immediate and positive results from their efforts. In fact, almost no examples exist of school-sponsored parent involvement programs of any nature NOT succeeding in their intended goals.

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Are educators so good at crafting and executing programs that they never fail? Is the situation so needy that any kind of involvement, regardless of its nature, will produce positive results? Or does the literature just not discuss (or, perhaps, report) attempts that are less than stellar? While any of these reasons might be true, a review of the research into parent involvement in public education is absolutely clear on one point. The past twenty years have shown an enormous number of different kinds and types of involvement programs in different schools all across the nation with virtually all apparently succeeding. Even accepting the position of drastic need as an explanation for the many programs' successes, these reports demonstrate that educators continue to "re-invent the wheel" each time they consider increasing the level of parent involvement.

This paper reports the results of an investigation into the status of parent involvement programs, asking the critical question of why so many different—yet apparently successful—programs exist. We begin by examining several of the rationales given in the literature for schools to engage in parent involvement programs. Many programs mention not only the results of their particular efforts, but also the orientations of the professionals in the schools towards their students' parents. A synthesis of this literature has led us to the development of a taxonomy of potential reasons for parent low- to non-involvement in public education. It will be our contention that schools need to develop a better understanding of the needs and situations (both social and economic) of their students' parents before developing programs to increase their education participation. It is through such an increased understanding that we believe parent involvement programs can become more focused. It is also our contention that, from recent experiences in three Chicago-area high schools, communications between the school and parents is the key to undertaking any parent involvement improvement program. These schools all demonstrated that parent involvement increases begin with the school reaching out to and talking with parents on a more frequent and effective basis.

Parent Involvement Programs

As mentioned previously, one kind of parent involvement occurs when a school institutes a program that requires parents to review their child's homework. Another kind of involvement takes place when a school invites parents to participate as volunteer classroom helpers. Both programs can be successful in achieving their different goals. Yet both programs make very different assumptions about the role of the school, the role of the parent, and appropriate ways for the two to interact. Understanding the issue of parent involvement, therefore, is not merely a matter of comprehending the simple intended and achieved results. One must also understand the roles of the school, student, and parent, and ways in which the involvement program seeks to improve a particular relationship.

As an example, the first situation described above is aimed primarily at improving the relationship between the parent and the child. At the very minimum a parent engaged in this intervention will interact more frequently with his/her child regarding homework and school. In the second scenario, not only is the parent-child relationship improved, but also improved are the relationships between parents and schools. Henderson, expanding on Ira Gordon and William Breivogel (1976), classified these types of parent involvement programs as (1) attempts to improve the parent-child relationship, (2) attempts to integrate parents into the school program, and (3) attempts to build a strong relationship between the school, family, and larger community. These major themes, and others to be discussed, each contribute to the make-up of every particular parent involvement initiative.

Programs to Improve Student Academic Performance

One factor underlying an increase in student achievement is the level of importance parents put upon education (Hart, 1988). Hart found that involving parents leads to increased academic achievement for students at all educational and economic levels. It was found that children of low socio-economic status (SES) tend to score below average regardless of the level of parent involvement with education across SES levels. All children, however, regardless of their SES, benefit academically from increased parent involvement (Benson, 1984). Low SES children consistently tend to score lower than high SES children on tests of academic achievement. When parents become actively involved in their child's education, the academic improvement in the student is more dramatic for the low SES child, even though that child will still tend to test lower than their higher SES counterparts.

Eagle (1989) found that parent involvement during high school was solely responsible for increased achievement once social background factors were controlled. Eagle examined the data for the 1980 cohort of high school seniors in the High School and Beyond data set. Her primary interest was in determining the exact influence of the home environment on achievement and on enrollment in and completion of post-secondary education as predicted by the National Center for Education Statistics SES composite score. The composite was made up of five different variables: (1) mother's education, (2) father's education, (3) family income, (4) father's occupational status, and (5) the number of certain types of possessions found in the student's home. Additionally, five measures of home environment were examined. These measures were: (1) composition of the household, (2) parental involvement during high school, (3) parents reading to the student during early childhood, (4) patterns of mother's employment, and (5) having a special place in the household for the student to study. In a multivariate analysis all effects except parental involvement exhibited non-statistically significant contribution to increased educational attainment. Like Hart, there was more than sufficient evidence to suggest an interaction between parental involvement, the various measures of SES and home environment, and academic achievement.

Coleman and Hoffer (1987) examined the relationship between schools and parents as it related to the disparity in student achievement as found in private, Catholic, and public high schools. Coleman and Hoffer asserted that the apparent differences in ability between public schools and private high schools may be due to selection on the part of the private school. Private schools have the ability to select an academically superior student body while the public schools cannot. However, Coleman and Hoffer found that Catholic high schools turn out students that are academically equal to, if not superior to, the private schools. From the data collected in their study they postulated that the success of the Catholic schools was due to their strong community ties and the willingness of their parents to become involved with their children's education.

Dornbusch's 1986 study detailed three distinct parenting styles: (1) authoritarian, (2) permissive, and (3) authoritative. The authoritarian style is characterized by rigid discipline and decidedly one-way communications, with only the parent's views being represented. Permissive parenting is typified by a parent with a laissez faire attitude. In this style, parents offer little guidance or goal setting and virtually no limitation on the child's behavior. In the third style, the authoritative parent sets and enforces limits on the child's behavior, defines expectations for success in school, and is open to feedback from the child. This style of parenting is not necessarily compromising, but rather allows for a two-way dialogue between parent and child.

Beyond the impact of parental styles on the student's decision to stay in school, Dornbusch found that the authoritarian and permissive orientations were related to lower student grade point averages while the authoritative style was related to higher G.P.A.s This research reinforces the importance of the parent-child relationship (as evidenced by parenting style), and the home-school link (as evidenced by the level of parental involvement).

Programs to Increase Student Attendance

Another benefit reported from involving parents is increased rates of student attendance. A program at one Iowa school involved parents by asking them to help verify their child's attendance (Kube & Ratigan, 1991). An old school policy forgave absences that were later justified by parents. This policy had led to mountainous administrative tangles and recidivism. Under a new school policy students were allowed only ten absences from each class per semester. Parents were required to verify each of their child's absences. In addition, parents were informed of all absences and all absences were counted toward the ten per class per semester limit, regardless of whether they were later justified by parents. In this way parents were held responsible for the attendance practices of their children. In the first year absences decreased by 65% and truancies by 78%.

Programs to Decrease At-Risk Behaviors

Parent involvement has also been linked to reducing the drop-out rate of high school students. Rumberger, Ghatak, Poulos, Ritter, and Dornbusch (1990) identified several parent involvement factors explaining students' drop-out decisions. Their research surveyed 114 tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade students at one California high school. These 114 students had been coded as drop-outs by their school on the California Basic Educational System (CBEDS) form. Students in the drop-out sample were matched on basic demographic data to similar students continuing in school. The study found that several parenting practices were positively correlated with the student's decision to drop out of school: (1) permissive parenting, (2) negative parental reactions to grades, (3) excessive adolescent autonomy, and (4) low overall parent involvement.

Schools have also involved parents in attempts to curb the incidence of drug and alcohol abuse. Klitzner (1990) conducted a large scale descriptive study of ten parent-led programs aimed at reducing drug and alcohol use. Factors such as the history of parent groups, structure and activities, the roles or group participants, and the perceptions of parents, youth, and community leaders regarding group effectiveness were all studied. At the time of this research (1990), parent-led groups were infrequent, typically involving only a handful of parents. In the communities where such groups arise, though, they are reported to be largely supported and frequently effective.

Programs Aimed at Decreasing Operating Costs

Involving parents in the process of public education can also lead to direct economic savings for the school. Schools may recover untold costs in remediation by utilizing available parents as aides and tutors instead of hiring paid personnel. This can free limited resources for use in other programs and improvements otherwise restricted by available assets.

Dorothy Rich (1986) outlined the initiatives advocated by the Home and School Institute for involving parents at school. Among them, Rich calls for the need to assign educational responsibilities to parents as well as providing training to teachers so that they are better equipped to utilize parents and work with families. These initiatives, undertaken in different forms by many schools nationwide, involve parents in the education of children—both their own and others—while allowing the school significant economic savings.

Involving Non- or Low-English Speaking Families

Gifted, disadvantaged children of both Anglo and Hispanic parents have benefited from a summer institute focusing on a differentiated parent education curriculum (Strom, Johnson, & Strom, 1990). Because the gifted children of disadvantaged families are typically under-represented in research, Strom, et al. specifically selected gifted children from both Anglo and Hispanic disadvantaged families. The researchers then used parents' scores on the Parent as a Teacher Inventory (PAAT) to construct individual parent education plans. These plans focused on helping parents to improve in such areas as: (1) arranging for solitary play time, (2) teaching decision-making skills and allowing students to practice making individual decisions, and (3) developing a respectful attitude toward child participation in conversations with adults.

Lucas, Henze, and Donata (1990) cite several key features found to be effective at aiding the language minority student. Encouraging parents to emphasize education at home was often cited. Several ways to encourage parents ranged from hiring staff who could speak the parent's language and sponsoring on-campus ESL classes to early morning meetings and telephone contacts between parents and counselors. Numerous such efforts have been cited as successful in reducing the number of language minority drop-outs at the schools where the interventions were attempted (Pell & Ramirez, 1990).

Many Kinds of Programs

The literature is replete with programs that have been very effective at increasing parental involvement with schools. In Tennessee, Donald

Lueder (1989) implemented a family math program to help parents and student develop problem-solving skills. Harlene Galen (1991) details a program to involve parents from such low levels as no involvement to a high end result of parents helping in the classroom, trained by the teacher. This continuum of increasing involvement is accomplished through the teacher inviting progressive levels of involvement from parents, then guiding and nurturing that involvement.

Interventions as straight forward as a parent-school contract (Kennedy, 1991) have been used to increase parent attendance at parent-teacher conferences as well as guaranteeing parent instruction in and use of computers. Such an educational contract has also been used to facilitate parent involvement in lieu of lengthening the school day (Bouie, 1987). The immediate effects of Bouie's program were that student study time increased and parents modeled high educational expectations. Parents in one Kansas high school are now tutoring students, sponsoring orientations, coordinating college clinics, compiling reading lists, and arranging for guest speakers because of an innovative program to involve parents as partners (Sandfort, 1987).

The prior research is convincing that schools are improving student performance by involving parents in a myriad of ways. Social contracts, attendance monitoring, parent-teacher meetings, in-class and at-home tutoring, and programs to help better educate parents are all ways in which schools are reaching out to parents. Parents, for the most part, genuinely appear eager to help with their child's education. The above mentioned programs, and others like them, are a testament to the successes possible for the schools who are willing to make the attempt to reach out to parents.

It is obvious that schools can and have succeeded in getting parents involved. So why is it that after nearly three decades schools are still searching for ways to make long-term connections with their students' parents?

Why Is There Still a Problem?

Though a multitude of intervention strategies purport to increase parent involvement in schools, it is doubtful that every intervention is as effective in each situation as the program planners might want. If this were the case then one streamlined intervention program, or some finite number of programs, would have become known as "the programs that work in this kind of setting." These programs would have been established and communicated to schools to meet almost every possible parent involvement situation. If it were the case that all interventions were effective all of the time, the incidence of parent involvement research articles should have decreased over the years instead of increasing.

Unfortunately we know that the majority of parent involvement interventions have been increasing over the last few years. A change in public attitude toward the school, coupled with an increasing desire on the part of professional educators to involve parents in educational functions, contributes to this change. Most of the interventions, though, have been attempted at the preschool (Bronfenbrenner, 1985) and early elementary grade levels (Brandt, 1989). Fewer studies have been reported at the junior and senior high school levels. What research there is, however, is convincing that parent involvement at all levels of schooling can lead to positive outcomes for the child, the parent, and the school.

We believe that parent involvement is important and effective at all levels of schooling. Furthermore, it is clear from prior studies that parents are involved in different ways and for different purposes as their children mature and move through our public education system. In the early years, parents' involvement with schools takes the form of field trip monitors, bake sale participants, at-home tutors and, increasingly, in-class teacher's aides. During junior high and high school, parental emphasis shifts toward the role of advisor, confidant, and administrator, as adolescents seek autonomy and begin to plan a life on their own.

The large number of different programs found throughout the literature would suggest that not all parents are as involved with their child's education as the schools would want them to be. Teachers would not still complain of the difficulties of getting parents to attend conferences, check homework, or answer notes if parents were that involved. Gay Eastman (1988) relates the story of one failed program, where the failure to involve parents seemed to be linked to the parents not being seen as partners with the school in general and with the teachers in particular. Eastman emphasizes the importance of conceiving the parent as a complement to the teacher and not an adversary, as is often the case. The perceptions each player has of the others' roles (i.e. parents, teachers, administrators, and students) would seem to be of primary importance. One key to gaining a parent's involvement would be to reinforce in parents their own importance to the student and to the school.

Even presuming that most parents are genuinely interested in the education of their children, it is true that some parents will still be relatively uninvolved with the school. The question then is, "Why isn't this parent involved?" Patricia Clark Brown (1989) lists the following possible reasons for low parent involvement:

1. Lack of time. Working parents are often unable to attend school events during the day.

2. Feelings of inadequacy. For many parents, school was not a positive experience. They may feel they do not possess the skills to help.
3. Overstepping their bounds. Confident parents may feel they should not "interfere" with the school's business (p. 3).

Albert Holliday (1986) reiterates and expands upon her list, adding:

1. School's organizational structure does not lend itself to sustained parent-teacher contact.
2. Adolescents are increasingly independent and may resist when parents attempt to become involved (p. 7).

It appears that there are abundant benefits to be gained for schools by seeking to involve the parents of their students. It is reasonable to assume that schools will want to make attempts at securing those benefits. Our review and synthesis of the literature base convinces us that schools must seek to match their intervention strategies to the needs of the parents in their district. By "targeting" their interventions, schools will use the programs that are the most effective at addressing the needs of the parents at whom they are aimed. Furthermore, before it is possible to "target" an intervention to a need, we must first understand the needs. Analysis of the previous research provides distinct indications of reasons why parents are not involved, or involved only slightly, in their children's education. Schools conversant with the reasons underlying low parent involvement can, we feel, better design and target their planned interventions.

Potential Reasons for Low Parental Involvement

No Prior Involvement

Parents operating from this perspective were previously rarely involved in their student's education. They feel that since they have never really had much contact with the school or their child's teacher(s) they really don't need to be involved now or at any time in the future. Parents may perceive their role as parents does not involve having anything to do with the formal education of their child. Interventions to involve these parents more would focus on improving the home-school relationship. Such interventions would focus on establishing a dialogue between the school as an entity and the parent to explore each player's expectations of the other.

My Kid is OK

Under this model, the parents believe that their child is doing fine in school and further involvement on their part is not needed. This case may be typified by the child who has all A's with the exception of a low or failing grade in one course. The parent minimizes the importance of the one low grade under the assumption that the child has always been a good student and that this is undoubtedly an aberrant occurrence. Once again, as in the previous reason, there is a miscommunication between home and school as to what each expects of the other.

Adolescent Seeking Self

Here the parents feel that their involvement is unwanted by the student. The parents rationalize that the student is going through a developmental phase and shuns parents' opinions. Such a parent might comment, "My input would be worthless since Joey ignores me anyway." This rationale is most prevalent in junior and senior high school and is meant to reference the change in the parent-student relationship that comes with the onset of adolescence, a striving for independence and individual identity. Patricia Clark Brown (1989) postulated a similar rationale. In order to be of service to both parent and student, interventions by the school might focus on improving the parent-child relationship through guided relationship building exercises.

Parent Abdicates Responsibility

The parents feel it is the school's job to educate their child and refuse to take on any of that responsibility. The parents remain uninvolved and out of touch with their child's educational process. Sandfort (1987) refers to this reason as "turn over" psychology and emphasizes the need for parents to once again "own" responsibility for their children's education. This reasoning is probably better known as the "logic of confidence" argument. This argument posits that teachers are performing competently and do not require close supervision (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Central to the "logic of confidence" argument is what Meyer and Rowan (1978) call the myth of professionalism. This is the notion that teachers can be expected to adhere to professional standards of performance and conduct because they hold appropriate degrees and certificates. School interventions to reach abdicating parents might include inviting parents into the classroom as observers.

Single Subject Classes

In high school, unlike elementary school, the child has several subjects and several different teachers. The changing of classes and teachers insures that there is no single identifiable contact person with whom a parent can build a "school" relationship. The "theme" of the teacher as a whole is reduced. For better or worse teachers become the subjects they teach. A similar rationale has been postulated by Holliday (1986). Further, Ziegler (1987) adds that "because of the rotary system and subject specializations, it is much more difficult for parents to know their children's teachers, and also to feel competent to help older children with their work" (p. 31).

Schools striving to reach parents should encourage teachers to contact parents more frequently either in person or via telephone. Also, school counselors could be utilized as contact persons for parents to call with questions regarding their child. The counselor could then coordinate with the child's teacher(s) to provide parents the answers they need.

The "New Math"

Ziegler's previous quotation inspires this reasoning as well. Here parents feel that the work the student is doing is beyond their personal expertise. Parents feel that they must be the expert in each subject. When they discover that they are not, they lose confidence in their ability to help. The research plainly shows, however, that parents' understanding of the work is not as important to student achievement as their willingness to try and help. Schools attempting to reach these parents could institute "refresher" parent education courses. These courses could emphasize the importance of the parent helping the child solve problems and helping to find the answers. The major intervention a school could make would be to help the parent(s) realize that they need not be able to do the child's course-work. School can make parents facilitators to education regardless of whether parents are ready or willing to be deliverers of education.

Hands Off

In this rationale parents perceive the school sending the message that parents do not understand educational practices, and therefore parents should not attempt to educate their children personally. Given the message that they are unqualified to help, parents avoid becoming involved in the education of their student. This case is most clearly evident in the failed intervention described by Eastman (1988). Accordingly, schools should nurture the role of parents as partners, complementing the teacher in the classroom, instead of parents as adversaries.

Parents Have No Time (Other Jobs/Odd Hours)

The parent who reports that he or she has no time to dedicate to being involved with his or her child's education often works many hours per week or is otherwise not available when the child is available. This rationale often underlies the inability of some parents to attend scheduled meetings with teachers or other school related functions. There is literally "no time." In order to reach this parent schools should look at the times they are offering for interaction with parents. Scheduling times other than the traditional "after school" slot for parent meetings could possibly help parents who have little time.

Parents Have No Time (Elect Other Activities)

This rationale is similar to the prior designation in that the parent(s) again report that they do not have time to devote to being involved with the school and/or their child's education. Unlike the parent who is working to maintain family basic needs, these parents elect to engage in other activities such as clubs or simply relaxing at home rather than working with their children. Schools should understand that there are parents whose attitudes will not be changed. If increased attempts to meet with parents, educate parents as facilitators, and generally bring parents in as partners in the children's education fail, then schools should look into providing extra educational support for the children.

A Negative Parental Attitude

In some cases parents have been turned off to school for some reason. They undervalue education and do not place importance in its attainment. For example, the parent who was never very successful in school, or for whom school was a traumatic experience, might fit into this rationale for low involvement. The parent with this attitude is clearly not sending a positive message to the child concerning the importance of education. Such an attitude is contradictory to Eagle (1989), Hart (1988), and several other theorists who state that parental emphasis on education is necessary for increased student achievement. While schools cannot change a parent's past experience, schools may be able to change current opinions by inviting parents into the school: (1) to observe classes, (2) for special programs and presentations, and (3) to provide input to the school regarding the types of classes and experiences parents would like their children to have.

Communication is Key

Regardless of the reason (or reasons) for low parental involvement one point remains consistent and clear throughout the literature. The first step in any parent involvement program includes the school reaching out to the parent. The exact ways and means of the involvement must vary according to the situation of the school and the parents, but all programs must begin with the simple act of communicating. Without the ability to talk with the parent, school programs cannot succeed.

This point was made abundantly clear in an ongoing piece of research in which we are both involved. Called Project Homeroom, this effort involves three Chicago-area high schools, IBM, and Ameritech. Selected students from each school received IBM personal computers and separate telephone lines for the purpose of communicating with their teachers. These students were organized into a common group with several teachers given responsibility for their core subject education. Computer and telecommunications equipment was placed in the schools, and also into the teachers' homes. In addition to specialized instructional software the project participants were given access to the Prodigy Information Service, to be used for both information access and electronic mail.

An early emphasis of Project Homeroom was to increase the involvement of participating student's parents. Parents were brought into the school early in the development of the program to explain components of the project. Special training sessions were also held at each of the schools to instruct the parents on the use of Prodigy and electronic mail. It was the plan of each school to have teachers routinely communicate with both students and parents through this electronic mail service.

As with any new enterprise, complications and problems arose during the first year of implementation (1991-92). Telecommunications and computer difficulties prevented all schools from coming "on-line" right at the start of the year. Many parents had to be coaxed into using the computer technology, with some never actually using it throughout the year. Many of the participating teachers reported using regular voice telephone conversations as an augment to the electronic mail.

By the end of the first year, however, interviews with both the teachers and parents described a large increase in the number of school-parent interactions as compared to the start of the year. Parents knew more of what their child was doing in school, were more cognizant of their successes and difficulties, and were more comfortable in approaching and speaking with their child's teacher. In a meeting held later in the year several parents complained that "the teachers were not as accessible [as they thought they should be]," even though these same parents reported conversing (through electronic mail or by voice) with their child's teachers an average of three to five times each week.

Teachers, for their part, had to change their view that school is "only an 8 to 3" proposition. They established regular hours outside of the school day to check their electronic mail and to respond, by regular voice telephone when necessary, to parent questions or concerns. One teacher reported having to finally "unplug the telephone" after parent calls continued into the evening well past any reasonable hour. Other teachers used a combination of electronic mail and voice answering machines to keep up with the flood of parental interest.

While all schools will not be able to implement a computer messaging program as accomplished in Project Homeroom, the missive from its results are clear. Parent involvement begins with school-parent communication. When a school is able to find ways that increase the likelihood of parents and teachers talking, those parents and teachers will converse with each other. Programs targeted at a specific parental needs and desires can then be planned and established.

Conclusion

In 1981, Henderson came to the conclusion, "The form of parent involvement does not seem to be critical, so long as it is reasonably well-planned, comprehensive, and long-lasting" (p. 7). Eleven years later it would seem that Henderson's argument still holds up quite well. It should be amended, however, to say that the form of the involvement does indeed seem to be critical. In order to involve the maximum number of parents in the education of their children, schools must understand the personal needs of those parents. Schools cannot understand their students' parents unless they are in two-way communication with those parents. Once teachers and students are really talking, schools must then plan their interventions and programs to focus on parental needs. We believe that we will begin to see fewer parent involvement programs reported once schools begin to undertake this approach. Further, the programs that will be reported will, we believe, show a greater success in terms of the number of parents they reach and keep involved with the school.

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Family Programs for Academic Learning

Herbert J. Walberg and Trudy Wallace

Outside school time is by far the largest segment of the student's waking life; it constitutes a potentially powerful influence on the small portion of time spent in school as well as an enormous extramural resource. For this reason, policy makers have experimented with parent-education programs during the past two decades. Educators, however, cannot implement such programs in a vacuum. The cooperation of parents as well as teacher and students is essential. Hence the term "parent partnerships" is often used. This article reviews research on parent involvement, with a focus on families of poverty, and provides descriptions of major program models.

Need for Parent Participation

The National Commission for Excellence in Education's *A Nation at Risk* (1983) identified parents as children's first and most influential teachers. The commission emphasized that parents play important roles in fostering children's inquisitiveness, creativity, and self-confidence. The National Commission, moreover, pointed out that the achievement of U. S. students was, by international standards, mediocre at best. Data on the mathematics achievement of the top five percent of students in affluent countries showed American students in last place. Achievement scores in science showed American high school students below Europe and Japan and tied with those in third-world countries (Walberg, 1989).

In an important paper on American, Japanese, and Taiwanese elementary mathematics classes, Stevenson, Lee, and Stigler (1986) showed some of the reasons for poor American rankings. IQ tests revealed that all three groups were equally able at the start of schooling. Each year, however,

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Asian students drew further ahead in achievement. A small achievement advantage at the end of the first grade grew ever larger so that by fifth grade, the worst Asian class exceeded the best American class. The Asian students had a more rigorous curriculum and worked at a faster pace; they studied more at school and, with their parents' encouragement, at home. In the U.S., parents more often attributed success to luck or ability; but in Asia, parents cited hard work as the key.

A U.S. Department of Education (1987) study also shows that Japanese students work intensively and extensively on academic tasks both inside and outside school. The numbers of hours spent in class, on homework, and at special evening tutoring schools, as well as the number of school days per year, are all substantially higher than in the U.S. Observations in Japan indicate that time spent in class and in outside study is also used more efficiently. Japanese students may be getting twice as much study time as our own; and a Japanese high school diploma may be roughly equivalent in total study time to an American baccalaureate. Educators and parents, however, can influence these time allocations, especially if they cooperate with one another.

The Matthew Effect

Students who are slow initially in school often continue at a slower rate; those who start ahead often gain at a faster rate, which results in what has been called the "Matthew effect," or the academically rich getting richer, originally noted in the *Bible* (Matthew 25:29, New King James Version: "For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.") This effect characterizes socioeconomic advantages in child development, school learning, and communication among adults (Walberg & Tsai, 1983), as well as the development of reading comprehension and verbal literacy (Stanovitch, 1987).

Ironically, although improved instructional programs may benefit all students, they may confer greater advantages on those who are initially advantaged. For this reason, the first six years of life and the "curriculum of the home" are decisive influences on academic achievement (Walberg, 1984; U.S. Department of Education, 1986). This "Matthew effect" of the educationally rich getting richer has been observed in many U.S. studies (Walberg & Tsai, 1983), and its pervasiveness is one reason educators and policy makers are expanding the number and scope of parent-partnership programs before and during the school years.

Family Trends

Changes in families bode ill for youth and provide all the more reason to strengthen home-school ties. During the century from 1860 to 1960, for example, the divorce rate in the United States held between thirty to thirty-five per thousand marriages. After 1960, however, non-marital cohabiting relations rose dramatically, and divorces increased to unprecedented levels. At current rates, about one-third of all American children will see the dissolution of their parents' marriage. The percentage of working mothers, moreover, rose from thirty-two percent in 1960 to fifty-six percent in 1981 (Cherlin, 1980). In view of such dramatic changes, educators feel called upon to help families provide constructive academic stimulation for their children.

Declining parental time investments in children may account in part for poor academic and job readiness. In a report for the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Coleman and Husen (1985) discussed three historical phases of family development that correspond to phases of economic development. In the subsistence phase, the family relies on children for work, and schools must free them and extend their opportunities. In the industrial phase, the goals of family and school converge to advance the child's development. In post-industrial affluence, however, childrearing may be an impediment to adult pursuits, and parents expect schools and other agencies to invest the time and energy in children's development. Any given society may have a mixture of educators and parents with these views or behaviors, which may cause various conflicts and misunderstandings, including those among generations.

In any case, Coleman (1987) persuasively argued that socioeconomically disadvantaged families can especially benefit from parent-education programs because they lack financial and psychological resources to help their children. They are short on "social capital," "the norms, the social networks, and the relationships between adults and children that are of value for the child's growing up. Social capital exists within the family, but also outside the family, in the community" (Coleman, 1987, p. 36). This point of view was consistent with psychological and educational theories that hold that coordinated school-home programs are likely to extend learning time and multiply effects (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Laosa & Henderson, 1991; Walberg, 1984).

Thus, programs can aid and encourage parents to provide their children with affection, guidance, habit-formation, and a consistent and constructive value system (Redding, 1991). Such programs go beyond academic psychological approaches (Walberg, 1984) to set norms for such parents characterized as "ready but alienated," "willing but frustrated," and "able but disengaged" (Redding, 1991, p. 152). They respond to research suggesting that parents find little reward in meeting teachers in conventional schools (Johnson, 1991).

Increased Benefit for Poor Families

Poverty may be found among all ethnic groups and geographic areas of the U.S. Recently, about fifty percent of black children lived in poverty, as did forty-four percent of white children of non-Hispanic origin. About nine percent of poor children live in inner-city ghettos, twenty-eight percent reside in suburbs, and forty-four percent of poor children are in rural locations (Scott-Jones, 1991).

Of critical concern are childrearing practices that inner-city, minority families use to motivate their children. Scott-Jones (1991) cited the students' family environment among the causes for the disproportionate placement of minority students in special education programs. However, competent black children who were reared in poverty had involved parents who actively acknowledged and supported their children's interests and goals (Garmezy, 1985). Competent, resilient children (identified by their ability to cope adequately with adult-life situations) had better parental relationships; their parents were more supportive of their goals; and they provided a clearly defined system of sanctions (Werner & Smith, 1982).

An early example of what can be done was begun in one of Chicago's most economically-depressed neighborhoods. Educators and parents developed an exemplary early parent-education program for grades one to six called "Operation Higher Achievement" at the Grant School in Chicago's near west side (Walberg, Bole, & Waxman, 1980). A joint school staff-parent steering committee at Grant initially formulated seven program goals such as "increasing parents' awareness of the reading process" and "improving parent-school-community relations." Seven ten-member staff-parent committees met periodically to plan and guide the accomplishment of each goal. The goals were based on a parent survey that showed that they wanted closer school-parent cooperation, stricter school discipline, and more educational activities conducted in the school and community for their children.

The committees wrote staff-parent-child agreements to be followed during the school year. The district superintendent, the principal, and teachers signed contracts for educational services to be provided to each child. The parents pledged such things as: providing a quiet, well-lit place for study each day; informing themselves about and encouraging the child's progress; and cooperating with teachers on matters of school work, discipline, and attendance. The children also signed improvement pledges. Small business merchants in the community raised funds to support book exchange fairs and other school activities. Evaluation of this program showed that the otherwise low-achieving, inner-city children can make normal middle-class progress in school (one year of achievement test gain in one chronological year).

Although parent-teacher interventions targeted on achievement goals may show the greatest learning effects, Williams (1983), at the Southwest Education Development Laboratory in Austin, Texas, described other constructive roles for parents in school programs. These roles include the following: audience for the child's work; home tutor; co-learner with the child; school-program supporter; advocate before school board members and other officials; school committee member; and paid school-staff worker. Although parents view their participation in some of these roles more favorably than do teachers and principals, all parties agree that there should be more parent involvement than now exists (Epstein, 1986).

The nation, moreover, can ill-afford to let any of these prospectively more productive agents remain a silent partner in improving educational productivity. Teacher training institutions could help by incorporating into teacher education programs information on family characteristics, the family impact on children's development, and ways to develop home-school relationships (Scott-Jones, 1991; Williams, 1991).

Partnership Models

Five categories of parent involvement emerged from Epstein's (1986) surveys of teachers, principals, parents, and students. The five categories include: (1) basic obligations of parents; (2) basic obligations of schools; (3) parent involvement at school; (4) parent involvement in learning activities at home; and (5) parent involvement in school governance and advocacy. Table 1 outlines sixteen specific strategies principals and teachers employ to involve parents.

Table 1. Sixteen Strategies to Involve Parents

1. Ask parents to read to their children regularly or listen to the children read aloud.
2. Loan books, workbooks, and other materials to parents.
3. Ask parents to take their children to the library.
4. Ask parents to get their children to talk about what they did that day in class.
5. Give an assignment that requires children to ask their parents questions.
6. Ask parents to watch a specific television program with their children and discuss the show.
7. Suggest ways for parents to include their children in any of their own educationally enriching activities.
8. Suggest how parents might use home material and activities to stimulate their children's interest in reading, math, and other subjects.
9. Send home suggestions for games or group activities related to children's schoolwork that can be played by a parent, child, and siblings.
10. Establish a formal agreement whereby parents supervise and assist children in completing homework tasks.
11. Establish a formal agreement whereby parents provide rewards and/or penalties based on the children's performance at school.
12. Ask parents to come to observe the classroom for part of the day.
13. Explain to parents certain techniques for teaching, for making learning materials, and planning lessons.
14. Give a questionnaire to parents so they can evaluate their children's progress or provide some other form of feedback.
15. Ask parents to sign homework to ensure its completion.
16. Ask parents to provide spelling practice, math drills, and practice activities, or to help with workbook assignments.

Note: Adapted from Epstein (1986).

As Epstein (1986) indicates, teachers report positive responses, across parents' educational backgrounds, to involving them in home-learning activities. Ninety percent of parents in Epstein's samples reported helping their children with homework occasionally, most with no direction from the child's teacher. Parents, however, participated more actively and had more positive attitudes when they received directions from teachers. Teachers believe that parent involvement promotes reading achievement gains, and more positive student attitudes toward and willingness to complete homework assignments.

Another report on teacher opinions shows that they believe the most successful parent-partnership programs emphasize either home visits, reading with children, or parents as tutors (Epstein & Becker, 1982). Each deserves discussion to show what kinds of programs are being tried. Those discussed below have been chosen because they illustrate diverse approaches, have been reported on in writing (though not necessarily in scholarly journals), and have at least some minimum evaluation.

The Home Visitation Component

Programs with a home visiting component appear to benefit participants and may eliminate the "wash out" effect—the dissipation of gains over time. At follow-up, achievement scores of treatment and control groups are comparable. In some programs, teachers visited homes and established communication with parents that continued throughout the year (Epstein, 1987). Three model programs will be discussed.

Home-Oriented Preschool Education

Gotts (1979) studied rural, lower-middle class West Virginia parents and their 600 three- to five-year old children who participated in the Home Oriented Preschool Education Program (HOPE). The program set out to prepare preschool children to participate successfully in school by increasing verbal interaction in the classroom and by reducing instances of extreme shyness, grade retention, and poor performance on standardized achievement tests. HOPE participants were selected from the geographically designated areas and randomly assigned to a treatment or a control group. As children left the program to enter school, the investigators repeated the same sample selection procedures to add subjects.

The HOPE intervention consisted of three components: (1) daily television lessons and follow-up home activities for the three- to five-year olds with companion parent guides that helped the parents understand what the child was learning on television; (2) weekly home visits by local, trained paraprofessionals who showed parents how to teach their children, listened to parents' concerns, and referred them to local health and social service agencies as needed; and (3) weekly half-day group experiences for children in a mobile classroom led by a teacher and an aide.

The daily television program, "Around the Bend," provided experiences to promote the child's cognitive development such as verbalizing answers, performing actions, and following directions. The central character, Miss Patty, provided a positive role model. About eighty percent of the parents and their children viewed selections from the more than 500 half-hour segments archived at Marshall University, Huntington, West Virginia. The evaluation of HOPE indicated the TV program component effectively fostered the participants' active attending, responding, and cognitive development.

The home visitors, paraprofessionals with high school and some college, were chosen on the basis of two criteria: (1) their ability to relate to young children and their parents; and (2) recommendations by local school principals. They were provided continuous in-service training to enable them to conduct the weekly home visits, deliver the program materials, discuss developmental learning activities for the child, document program implementation and participants' reactions, and counsel or make referrals on child-care, nutrition, and health problems.

The "classroom on wheels" was staffed with one teacher and an aide who conducted eight half-day classes for fifteen children per session. Each child attended the portable classroom one half-day a week. The classroom component had three goals: (1) to reinforce the developmental activities provided by the TV component; (2) to provide a group socialization process; and (3) to provide the child experience with an alternate, non-family caretaker so as to reduce the child's potential separation anxiety upon entrance to regular school. The majority of parents were cooperative and committed to the program. The home visitor served as a role model and teacher to the parent.

Gotts (1981) reported positive cognitive effects for the treatment groups receiving home visits as measured on the Appalachia Preschool Test (APT), which measured children's early conceptual development, and the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test. The effects of HOPE on childhood curiosity (defined as the length of time up to fifteen minutes the child interacted with a mechanical instrument) emerged more significant for boys than girls; treatment children receiving home visits acted more curious than those in the control group. The treatment groups receiving home visits also demonstrated the most positive social interaction. Videotapes of groups of four children playing with a train indicated the treatment group initiated more constructive statements, was the most enthusiastic, and least inclined to withdraw from the activity compared with the control group.

The treatment groups' achievement (measured by report card grades) at grades one and two was significantly higher than the control group. Grade retention was significantly higher between grades one and nine for children who did not receive home visits. Grade retention, which was at the twenty-five percent level for the control group, was reduced to five percent by the home visits. The School Behavior Checklist indicated home-visited children were significantly more organized, and exhibited fewer symptoms of depression. The investigator ranked children's scores on the basis of coping ability: seventy-two percent of home-visited and sixty percent of controls were categorized as coping well.

At the completing of the pilot phase the investigators concluded that the HOPE delivery system could be operated by public schools with the direct involvement of the Appalachia Educational Laboratory. HOPE became part of a national demonstration project called "Home Starts." Replication studies were done in Virginia, Alabama, Tennessee, Ohio, and another part of West Virginia. Results of follow-up studies will determine the long-term effects of the intervention.

Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters

Lombard (1981) reported the results of a controlled study of the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters for four- to six-year old rural children in Israel. Instructors showed mothers how to teach their children language skills, problem solving, and perceptual discrimination using highly structured materials. Weekly meetings alternated between home visits and group meetings. The weekly meetings emphasized teaching the mother specific activities for home instruction through role-playing. The first-year assessments indicated positive effects based on results of the Frostig Test of Visual Perception, the Goodenough Draw-a-Man Test, and the Columbia Test of Mental Maturity.

Parental Empowerment Program

The Parental Empowerment Program (Cochran & Henderson, 1986) involved 225 New York families and their three-year old children. The two-year intervention had two strategies. First, home activity visits by paraprofessionals were based on the assumption that parents are the experts concerning their own children. The home visits reinforced and enriched parent-child activities and provided information about child development. Second, the paraprofessionals brought neighborhood families together to share information in mutual support groups. The program positively influenced the number of home-school communications made by parents, and expanded the families' social support. Children who had been in the pre-kindergarten intervention had better first-grade report card grades in reading, language, mathematics, and science than a control group.

The Reading Component

Parent programs focusing on reading appear to have helped elementary school children. Two in the United Kingdom and one in the United States are notable.

Paired Reading

Morgan (1979) studied a Paired Reading-Parental Tuition Program designed for children with reading deficits. Paired reading, based on behavioral learning theory, involves the parent and child in simultaneous oral reading which provides the child with a reading model. In a second phase, the parent and child alternate reading aloud, and the parent provides praise and reinforcement. Morgan's experiment proceeded at home during daily quarter-hour sessions with weekly thirty-minute monitoring sessions. All subjects made gains in reading achievement. Bushell and Robson (1982) replicated the study with parents of seven-to eleven-year old children.

Haringey Reading Project

Hewison and Tizard (1982) reported on the Haringey Reading Project carried out by researchers from the London University Institute of Education who collaborated with teachers and parents at six multi-ethnic inner-London schools with poor reading scores. Parents helped their children read at home three times a week from material sent home. The children (aged seven to eleven years) who received help from their parents attained reading scores far superior to the reading scores of the control group.

Parents in Action

The Parents in Action Program (PIA) started in Alice, Texas, in 1970. Alice's population of 35,000 includes seven elementary schools, one junior high school, and one high school. The goals of PIA are: to bring school and community together; to reinforce children's education in reading and mathematics; and to recruit and train parents in ways that support existing programs dealing with language development, mathematics, and reading.

The program activities include the following:

- Parents view preschool TV programs to help students in the Alice Independent School District.
- Workshops train parents in reading and mathematics methods used in their schools.

- Orientation sessions are conducted for parents of preschoolers.
- Parents participate daily in the preschool program.
- Parents are trained to use mathematics and reading materials developed by parents in previous years.
- Activities are closely tied to school management systems.
- Parents participate in activity councils.

Initially, a PIA program operated at each school. The program focused on teaching parents crafts such as basket weaving which parents taught their children at home. PIA was administered from a Central Parent Involvement Center, with the emphasis shifted to an academic focus for the elementary school component.

Parents are recruited by letter, and the program is widely publicized in the local *Community Builder* and the *Alice Echo*, a newspaper whose editors are on staff at the central offices of the Alice Independent School District. Introductory, one-hour workshops are conducted on an ongoing basis for parents new to the district. Information regarding school policies and PIA operation and participation are provided. Migrant and immigrant parents are provided information on social security and welfare systems.

The director of PIA conducts annual workshops for Alice teachers. The teachers develop the PIA curriculum materials to complement, reinforce, and provide enrichment to the academic curriculum. Daily ninety-minute workshops were then conducted for up to twenty parents (predominately mothers) throughout the school year. The director of PIA, aided by a central office staff as needed, assists the parents in constructing games and activities based on the teachers' curriculum prototypes. Parents use this as an opportunity to demonstrate their artistry and creativity. For example, parents of primary-level students made alphabet cards illustrated with Speedy Gonzalez comic strip characters. Parents of beginning readers made "Dracula" sight-word vocabulary cards. The basic materials for these and other PIA workshops are purchased with Chapter 1 funds.

To expand the net of participation, the director of PIA scheduled neighborhood workshops in local churches during evening hours for working parents. This strategy succeeded in involving reluctant parents (who for some reason refused to attend sessions conducted at the local center).

The junior high school and high school PIA component aimed at averting students' school-related discipline problems. PIA staff procured the names and telephone numbers of students exhibiting absenteeism, poor grades, or symptoms of drug or alcohol abuse. The director contacted parents individually and provided family counseling in the students' homes. The family viewed the film "Parents in Action" which provides strategies for improving family communications.

Since Alice is a poor district, lack of consistent financial support presents an obstacle to PIA's continued success. Recent cuts in state funding forced the director to reduce his staff from twenty to about twelve. The district vetoed fund raising, but the director obtained the local bank's executive conference room for PIA use during off hours. PIA televises an annual award ceremony from the bank conference room.

The director cited a number of benefits from PIA, including gains in reading and mathematics on state tests and better cooperation among parents, teachers, and principals. Moreover, twelve former aides in the program became certified teachers. The continued support of the central office staff, which consists of the superintendent, assistant superintendent, counselors, administrators, and special education staff, was crucial to the future of PIA. They provided assistance in recruiting parents to the program, planning curricula prototypes, and conducting daily workshops.

The Tutorial Component

U.S. teachers cite parental encouragement and supervision of learning activities at home as particularly helpful to successful school learning, but information is lacking about the kinds of parent tutoring or supervisory skills that are most appropriate (Epstein, 1987). Data on three parent-as-tutor programs, however, provide evidence of program effectiveness for preschool and elementary school students.

Parents-as-Tutors Home Learning Program

Working from the Home School Institute (in Washington, D.C.), Dorothy Rich (1979) developed home learning "recipes" for elementary school students and their parents. Her Parents-as-Tutors Home Learning Program was piloted in four classes of inner city and suburban first graders and their parents. The participants had eight bi-weekly experiences. For example, to help children gain the sense of discipline necessary to remain motivated, parents and children practiced the "no-nag writing system" (Rich, 1988). Families observed five minutes of silence daily. During this time family members wrote notes to one another such as, "Please pass the toast" and "May I have my lunch money?" Reminder notes were posted around the house (e.g., in the kitchen or on a child's pillow). The program showed positive gains in reading.

Mother-as-Teacher Programs

Waksman (1979) studied forty-eight three- to five-year olds and their mothers who were partners in the Mother-as-Teacher Program in Ontario, Canada, which included a three-week training program and a home visiting component. The parents carried out twenty-two activities with their children over a twenty-week period. Positive results were found on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, the Metropolitan Readiness Test, and teacher observations of child behavior.

Jungnitz (1983) reported a longer study in the U.K. of one year's duration. Parents taught their children school subjects at home. Weekly home visits by school personnel provided supervision and counseling for the families. The program participants, two- and three-year olds, developed significantly in reading, mathematics, language, and motor skills.

Arkansas Parents: Partners in Learning Experiences

In 1981, the Baker Elementary School in Bentonville, Arkansas, implemented the Arkansas Parents: Partners in Learning Experiences (APPLE). Coordinated by the school counselor, APPLE helps parents learn to work with schools and their children. This statewide project, mandated and funded by the Arkansas legislature, provides training for project counselors and disseminates the training manuals and materials published by the Arkansas Department of Education. Act 37, one of thirty-three acts passed by the Arkansas Legislature in 1983, addressed the issue of educational reform in the state, and provided for an increase in student achievement through direct parent involvement in teaching basic skills to their children.

Act 37 directed the Arkansas Department of Education to develop and implement a structured program for training parents as teachers. It required the following program components: courses for parents to be offered by educational television; materials and study guides to accompany the courses; identification of teachers skilled in working with parents to conduct instructional sessions; resource speakers, films, and supplementary materials; and training for parents to implement the program.

An APPLE administrator conducts the statewide training program at Little Rock, and local coordinators attend a six-hour training workshop which emphasizes the following: developing parent-school partnerships; implementing parent involvement programs; maintaining parent involvement in the academic growth of their children; and identifying strategies designed to help parents enhance their children's academic skills in reading, language, and mathematics. The full-time APPLE counselors are former masters-level teachers, or persons holding administrator or counselor certificates.

As an example of the way the program was implemented, the school staff attempted to recruit all 600 of the third and fourth graders. Formal letters were dispatched to the parents of each Baker student announcing upcoming APPLE workshops for parents. Follow-up letters and telephone calls concluded each recruitment cycle.

Ten parent workshops were conducted in the 1987-88 school year, with twenty-five parents participating in each workshop. Typically, each parent participated in four sessions (or workshops) out of the total of ten. The parent participation rate for the current year is seventy-five to 100 parents. In 1985-86, fourteen parents participated. The target was 100% parent participation.

Each of the ten parent workshop sessions was two hours in length, with optional day and evening sessions. The project had an academic focus, providing parents training in assisting their child in reading, language, mathematics, and study skills. Training in each subject area was offered separately. The program emphasized communication skills between children and their parents with the objective of improving parenting skills.

The workshops were based on the APPLE training manual published by the Arkansas Department of Education and provided for Project APPLE. The manual contains workshop materials for each subject area mentioned previously, information on each topic, instructions for presentation, and activity sheets with duplicating sheets for dissemination to workshop participants. The authors advocate several presentation methods: lecture, question and answer with script included, and videotape.

Parents provided reactions to the workshops, indicating they preferred workshops conducted in a lecture format to those using videotapes. Parents liked having the opportunity to pose questions to the lecturer and exchange ideas with other parents. Time was a crucial factor for parents; some found workshops scheduled during daytime inconvenient. As a result, the program coordinator organized a Thursday evening session. Outcomes of the APPLE project included: Baker's student achievement improved; parents became more involved and interested in their children's school; parent involvement reinforced the children's school learning; parent/child communication improved. In the long run, it was expected that the project would reduce student discipline problems.

The APPLE Project was keenly supported by the principal and school administrative staff, who attended the parent workshops. Baker teachers expressed appreciation for the program, but did not support the project by attending the workshops. Limited parent participation impeded the success of the project; only about twenty percent of Baker parents were involved.

The School Community

In the late 1980s, the Academic Development Institute (ADI) had educated more than 10,000 Chicago-area parents on how to help their children. Although the programs were successful in helping parents and children, the board of directors was concerned about Matthew effects, reaching difficult-to-serve families, better integration of the program into the mainstream of the school, and sustaining and multiplying its effects.

With Chicago's extraordinary school-restructuring plan allowing for parental governance of distinctive schools and extensive voluntary choice, the time seemed propitious for a new approach. Under grants from the MacArthur Foundation, ADI created the Alliance for Achievement in which 33 schools cooperated as development-demonstration sites to build a "school community" to unite the school's constituencies to deepen and expand the scope of learning (Redding, 1991).

With advice from James Coleman, Ralph Tyler, and Herbert Walberg, ADI helped each school to carry out the steps to a school community outlined in Table 2. The aim was to develop a common and distinctive view of each school's purpose among educators and parents, identify four top-priority values of the school community, and enact systematic efforts to carry them out. This program represented a new order, a distinct and promising effort to at once establish and maintain systematic cooperative efforts of parents and educators, while encouraging lasting educational reforms.

ADI's blueprint for building a school community based on locally-defined educational values, Alliance for Achievement, was adopted by the Laboratory for Student Success (LSS) at Temple University in 1995. After further field testing in schools served by LSS (a regional educationl laboratory for the mid-Atlantic states), Alliance for Achievement became a component of Community for Learning, a nationally-validated model for comprehensive school reform based on the pioneering work of Margaret C. Wang.

Table 2. Steps to a School Community

Representation
- Establish a school council of the principal, four parents, and two teachers
- Develop a constitution for the school community

Value Base
- Adopt four school community values
- Restate the values as goals for all student
- Develop school community expectations for all teachers, parents, and students

Communication
- Prepare first School Community Report
- Integrate values and expectations into two-way, school-home communication

Education
- Offer education programs for teachers, introduce expectations, continue meetings, share suggestions
- Offer education programs for parents including a short course on each value and related expectations

Common Experience
- Plan a common experience (program, curricular component, activity, or event) for each value

Association
- Plan an association, a bringing together of people, for each value. Make one association intra-generational, one involving families and educators, and one involving college students and/or older generation

Note: Adapted from Redding (1991, pp. 154-155).

Conclusion and Implications

Synthesis of educational and psychological research in ordinary schools shows that improving the amount and quality of instruction can result in substantially more effective academic learning (Fraser et al., 1987). But since children spend about eighty-seven percent of their waking hours outside school, parent involvement is a second key to improvement. The effects of home interventions on learning are plausible and reasonable and consistent. Synthesis of research on short-term intervention programs show moderate and sometimes large positive effects on children's learning. The effects might be even larger if home-intervention programs were to be more systematic and sustained.

Parents view their participation in partnership programs more favorably than do teachers and principals, but all parties agree that there should be more parent involvement (Epstein, 1987). The nation, moreover, can ill afford to let any of these potentially more productive agents remain as silent partners in solving the national crisis in educational productivity.

Thus, while ongoing local evaluation and further research are in order, there seems little reason to hesitate in implementing more widely and systematically programs featuring home visiting, parent reading, parent tutoring, and other partnership programs that have been sporadically evaluated. Program features that prove effective for inner-city, minority families and children of poverty include positive parental support of children's goals, a clearly defined system of sanctions, and commitment to parental obligations to ensure children's school success. These and other more specific practices discussed in this review can now be recommended.

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Connecting Families and Schools through Mediating Structures

Vivian R. Johnson

Despite increasing evidence that parental involvement improves children's performance in schools and improves schools (Henderson, 1980, 1987, Henderson & Berla 1994), there are continuing problems of involving low-income parents and other low-status parents in the schools their children attend. Studies have shown that the problem of involving these so-called "hard to reach" parents in their children's schooling exists in several countries (Davies, et al., 1987).

Ogbu (1978, 1983) has examined the relationship between the poor school performance of low- status children in a society and discontinuities between the cultural backgrounds of those children and the culture of the schools they attend. His research suggests that while discontinuities exist between home and school for all children, the discontinuities are greatest and the school performance is poorest for caste-like minorities in societies. For these caste-like groups, their lower caste position of inferiority in the society surpasses any class stratification that exists so the groups may not view the schools as a means of upward mobility, because change upward in class status does not result in change in caste status. The problem of caste status is therefore a major social problem especially for racial minorities in some societies.

The existence of the larger societal issue of the caste-like status of some groups in societies has sometimes led educators to assert that schools are unable to counteract major societal problems of poverty and discrimination. Therefore until society changes, schools are unlikely to change. However, evidence of successful schools within communities of caste-like minorities challenges the assertion that schools must follow, rather than lead, positive social change (Comer, 1980, 1990, Slavin & Madden 2000).

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While there are some successful schools in low-income and minority communities, such schools are still not prevalent in these communities. A study by Davis, et al. (1987) examines this problem in Portugal and reveals a number of concerns which are linked to two closely related variables: (1) poor communication between home and school, and (2) limited outreach from schools to homes, especially in communities with large numbers of poor and minority students. Both variables are related to issues of power and the reduced ability of people with low status in a society to benefit from the society. The purpose of this article is to suggest a social strategy to use mediating structures to promote empowerment of low-status families in schools to address the cross-national problem of persistent poor school performance of children of low-status groups.

Mediating structures have been defined by Berger and Neuhaus as ". . . those institutions standing between the individual and his private life and the large institutions of public life" (1980). For each child, therefore, the institution of the family is a mediating structure between him or her and the school. However, Bourdieu (1977) suggests that the ability of the family to mediate between the child and the school is a function of the amount of cultural capital or skills, disposition, background, and knowledge the family possesses, and low-income and minority families are less likely to successfully mediate for their children because they have less cultural capital that schools value and reward than do high-income and mainstream families. The result is these families appear hard to reach because they are less likely to initiate communication with or respond to communication from schools (Heleen, 1988).

Reports of feelings of inadequacy in relations with schools are not uncommon from these families. In his study in Portugal, for example, Davies reported that one parent said, "When my child has a problem, I feel ashamed" (1987). Low-status families frequently say they don't understand how schools work, and they feel denigrated by teachers. Feelings of inadequacy are more severe if parents' own educational backgrounds are limited or if their school experiences were negative. However, some parents are not intimidated by schools—they are simply preoccupied with providing basic necessities of food, shelter, and clothing for their families, or they are in need of child care in order to have time available to become involved in schools.

Any or all of the reasons cited above—feelings of inadequacy, limited school background, or preoccupation with basic necessities—may prevent parents from communicating with schools. However, schools are in the best position to initiate communication. They are more powerful and better able to reach out to parents than parents are able to reach into schools. Therefore, when schools' communication with parents is difficult, other institutions close to the family are needed to support the family structure, and promote empowerment to increase the family's capacity to overcome fears and other constraints. It is therefore suggested that schools use mediating structures within and around families to promote family empowerment. These mediating structures include (1)extended family members, (2) neighborhood groups, (3) religious groups, and (4) other voluntary associations.

Mediating Structures

Before discussing the use of mediating structures, it is necessary to examine mediation and how it occurs. If one accepts the premise that basic values are generated and maintained primarily through families and their extensions, including neighborhoods, religious groups, and voluntary associations, then the family and these extensions are the structures that mediate (or stand between) the individual and megastructures within the state such as schools and other instruments of government. Seeley (1985) noted the relationship between education and mediation structures:

> Whatever else education may be, it is a process by which people seek to transmit their world, and most particularly their values, to their children. It is a primary strength of mediating structures that they are value generating and value bearing institutions. This is especially true of family, church, and voluntary associations.

Mediation occurs when people we know and trust advocate for us and represent our interests to people we know less well or not at all. Mediation is therefore a special type of advocacy because it provides representation of our interests by advocates with greater power than we have. In the case of schools, the greater power of our advocates may be shown by their greater knowledge of (1) language used in the school, (2)school requirements and procedures, (3) school curriculum, (4) expectations of the school for children's behavior (including but not limited to discipline), or (5) school culture which determines who to speak to, when and how to speak, and what to ask for.

Items one through five above involve negotiating the institutional culture of schools. Negotiations with schools as a societal subculture are complicated and require knowledge of norms, mores, and styles that operate within schools but are less likely to operate in the homes and neighborhoods of people from cultural groups that are not part of the mainstream culture of a society. Knowledge of the mainstream culture and, therefore, knowledge of the school culture, is part of the cultural capital of high-status groups in a society, but that knowledge may be only partially known, or not known at all, by low-status groups. However, some family members in low-status groups may have greater skills and experience in school negotiations and these persons should be encouraged to mediate for other family members. For immigrant parents who don't speak the mainstream language, for example, there might be a teenage child, relative, or friend who can mediate for the parents by attending school meetings, conferences with teachers, or school events.

Suggestion: Families as Mediating Structures

Schools interested in promoting family outreach and increasing involvement should find ways of informing parents of the possibility of sending an advocate to schools, getting questions answered through advocates and getting their assistance as needed. Schools may consider providing special training for family advocates so that the process of representation is improved and might include steps that might be followed to have parents accompany advocates and receive help from them in orientation sessions that help parents begin to function in schools with less and less assistance.

Examples

This empowerment process through advocacy might require different amounts of time for different parents, but the sequence of steps could be the same for all parents. This sequence could include the following steps for schools to take: (1) sending information home to inform parents about the use of advocates to assist them in learning about schools, (2) providing examples of ways that advocates might help families, (3) suggesting helpful items to discuss with advocates such as the school-year calendar, school curriculum, homework requirements, school procedures, and school people to contact for particular needs, (4) inviting parents to an orientation meeting to which they may bring advocates, (5) visiting parents at home to complete this orientation to give parents an opportunity to ask questions that they may be uncomfortable asking in a group meeting, and (6) continuing home visits to assist parents in helping children with homework (Johnson, 1991, 1994). It is very important that advocates continue to assist parents until they feel comfortable functioning in schools alone.

Suggestion: Neighborhood Groups as Mediating Structures

Before functioning in schools without advocates, parents may feel more comfortable meeting school personnel in parents' neighborhoods. Families live in neighborhoods whose boundaries they define. Neighborhoods are those places which provide the comfort of familiarity of people, places, procedures, events, and landmarks. The public schools located in neighborhoods don't necessarily provide the sense of comfort of familiarity provided by other places such as food shops, post offices, and specialty shops because none of the shops have the level of authority or the same ability to judge a child's future as schools. Given the power of schools to determine our futures, it is no wonder that people feel intimidated by them. Therefore, schools are often citadels of authority and power in neighborhoods, but often not a comfortable part of neighborhoods because they do not reach out to the communities that surround them. However, neighborhood communities can serve as mediating structures between families and schools if schools encourage outreach to the neighborhood. Just as extended family members with greater negotiating skills can serve as advocates of families who lack adequate school language skills or other skills necessary for negotiation with schools, members of neighborhood groups, organizations, and business people can also mediate on behalf of families.

Examples

For example, business people whose shops are frequented by families over time come to know those families well, watch their children grow and can often advocate on behalf of the children, represent a family or serve as translators for families without sufficient knowledge of the school language. Similarly, family physicians, dentists, nurses, and other professionals can often mediate between families and schools. But neighborhood advocates need not be business or professional people to mediate successfully; they need only have the skills necessary to negotiate with schools and be willing to use those skills on behalf of families in order to be successful mediators. The key is for schools to encourage such mediation or advocacy so that parents know that schools are willing to accept their representative and they can then request help from those people they know and trust to help them negotiate the unknown school culture.

Within any neighborhood, residents know who has the skills to assist them. Usually, the problem is not that families cannot identify assistance, but schools don't encourage advocacy for families. Schools usually assume that parents know how schools function and they make no provision for those parents who do not. By encouraging parents to seek assistance and bring those advocates with them to the schools until they feel comfortable in mediating for their children, schools are more likely to have successful outreach to parents who are outside the mainstream culture.

Suggestion: Religious Groups as Mediating Structures

Given the separation between church and state in most countries, public schools avoid any contact with religious groups because educators may believe such contact is outside their scope of work. While there are indeed possible difficulties in working through religious groups in order to encourage their mediation on behalf of families, schools should consider ways these groups serve families in the community and determine how the religious groups might also serve families on behalf of children in schools.

Examples

For example, religious affiliation is a form of extended family grouping which people join because they share values and feel comfortable. The fact that people feel more comfortable in these places should provide an opportunity for school outreach. Religious groups have building space where parents may feel more comfortable to come for orientation information about schools. The schools might also meet with religious leaders to request their help in getting information to parents about school procedures, curriculum, and special events. Often religious leaders are willing to organize tutoring programs, language classes for parents or other meetings which will help parents to learn about schools and help their children increase their school performance. The suggestion is not that schools involve themselves with the religious beliefs of their students, but rather consider the possibility of connecting with parents to invite their involvement in school activities through the mediation of religious leaders who are close to the parents. Schools should reach out to parents where they are, and they are in families, neighborhoods, and religious gatherings.

Suggestion: Voluntary Associations as Mediating Structures

In addition to religious groups, many parents also belong to other voluntary associations, through which schools may reach out to them. These voluntary associations include, but are not limited to, clubs, benefit societies, sports organizations, musical and literary associations, Masonic organizations, and all types of interest groups. Many such voluntary associations are found in communities throughout the world, and they provide a source of affiliation and support for people. Since they are voluntary, they indicate whom people want to associate with and whom they respect and trust. The associations therefore represent a mediating structure through which schools might reach parents and other family members to invite their involvement in schools for the benefit of children.

Examples

For example, a school might invite a musical or craft association to perform a concert or present an exhibit at the school. Parents in the association whose children attend the school could be given special recognition. Perhaps those parents could make a special presentation to their children's classes. Thus parents are invited into the schools through the voluntary association to which they belong, thereby improving the schools' connections to both the community association and to the parents of children in the school. Parents who may be shy about performing in the school alone are more likely to come with the group initially and may perform alone at a later time. In addition to addressing the possible problem of shy parents, the school is also acknowledging talent and ability in the community.

Conclusion

Educators' acknowledgement of skills and talents in neighborhoods in which schools are located sends an important, positive message to families that the educators value the communities in which the school is located. By failing to develop positive communication with local neighborhoods, educators in low-income and minority communities frequently send the message that there is nothing in those communities worthy of educators' consideration. Schools therefore stand as citadels of exclusion inside the communities they are supposed to serve. In contrast, those educators that find ways to use mediating structures to reach out to families, neighborhoods, religious groups, and other voluntary associations near their school are more likely to promote all children's academic and social success in schools.

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Creating a Community of Readers

Paul J. Baker and R. Kay Moss

During the opening decades of the twentieth century, the elementary public school was fully institutionalized as a place of lonely work for teachers and students alike. Each teacher was assigned to a classroom, and each student, in turn, was assigned to a desk. This educational invention remains firmly in place throughout the United States. For several generations, school work has been conducted behind closed doors. Students are either listening to the teacher give instructions or working silently at their desks. Numerous accounts of life in American schools depict encapsulated classrooms guided by norms of social isolation (Goodlad, 1984; Sarason, 1991).

In the progressive era, many educators were convinced that methods of scientific instruction and scientific management could be applied to an elaborate scope and sequence curriculum. They designed learning tasks by grade levels and by ability groups within each grade level. Publishers and educational managers have been refining this system for most of the twentieth century. Grandparents, parents, and children are all familiar with the daily diet of standardized, yet fragmented, learning experiences that were carefully recorded in various workbooks. These workbooks were always kept at the students' desks and available on command of the teacher. "Please get out your reading workbook." But the last week of school always brought a sweet moment of revenge as kids gleefully trashed their workbooks on the way home. At last, they were free from the drudgery of school.

During the past decade, numerous reformers have challenged the merits of the factory-model of schools (Fiske, 1991; Goodman, et al. 1988; Sarason, 1991). Many of these critics have argued that schools should be less bureaucratic and more communally inclined. There are many variations on the communal themes of educational change. Perhaps the most popular development in this area is the widespread interest in cooperative learning. Other important endeavors include the development of collaborative schools (Barth, 1990), Essential Schools (Sizer, 1992), and James Comer's work with

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mental health teams (1980). Many of these efforts promote opportunities for shared involvement among staff, students, and parents. This article addresses another aspect of communal development: creating a community of readers that is school-wide in character.

For most of this century, educators have taught reading as isolated sets of skills (hierarchial in nature and with detailed subskills) to be mastered and then applied in context. Students' mastery of these language fragments has been managed through individualized programs, ability groups, or whole group "tracking." Little attention, however, has been given to the creation of reading communities that go beyond the work of individual teachers inside each classroom. We see the need to explore learning opportunities for young readers in a broader context that includes the principal, all teachers, all students, and their parents. We believe schools should be more than the aggregation of classrooms that are connected by hallways. Schools are places that can foster a clear sense of community that encompasses staff, students, and parents. There is no better topic for building school-wide community than the joys and excitement of reading. We report on several recent endeavors to build communities of readers.

The Alliance for Achievement and the Value of Reading

The Alliance for Achievement is a network of schools committed to building value-based learning communities. The central organizational principle of the Alliance is the collaborative work of parents and teachers who identify, articulate, and develop a core set of values that are intended to permeate the entire school and every home where students and parents continue the learning process. A School Community Council is formed with four parents, two teachers, and the principal who serves as chairperson. Their work is guided by an eleven-step developmental model that includes the adoption of four school community values. One of the educational values most frequently adopted by the School Council is reading. We will use reading to illustrate the collaborative work of building a school community.

The central task of each School Community Council is to identify a short list of essential values that can focus the work of all members of the school community. According to the guidelines, "A school community value is a learned quality (ability or characteristic) that school community members believe is fundamentally desirable for all students" (Redding, 1991). An educational value attains the status of a school community value when it meets the following criteria:

1. It is considered valuable by most, if not all, school community members;
2. It is attainable by all students;

3. It is achieved through learning, including learning at home as well as learning at school;
4. It is applicable to all curricular areas of the school program rather than to specific areas, and;
5. It is achieved through the combined efforts of the students, parents, and teachers.

These five fundamental conditions are applied systematically to such school community values as decency, studying, and reading. The communal nature of such values as reading is crucial. Reading is no longer the privatized work of teachers and students with an occasional acknowledgment by parents. According to many school leaders in the Alliance for Achievement, reading has been elevated to a school-wide value that is nourished by common experiences for students, teachers, and parents.

Once the School Community Council has identified reading as one of its school community values, the leaders will restate this value as a *school community goal* for *all* its students. A goal statement will then be formally written by the Council. Many schools in the network have adopted such statements as the following: "Because [this school] values reading, it is the goal of [this school] that all students learn to read well, read often, and enjoy reading." The emphasis is on reaching *all* students with concrete goals that are attainable through the collaborative efforts of teachers and parents.

How can school leaders be assured that all students will pursue such goals as reading well, often, and with enjoyment? It is easy to state goals. The School Community Council seeks to go beyond platitudes by spelling out specific expectations for teachers, parents and students. These expectations are stated in clear behavioral terms as guidelines for action. Behavioral clarity is crucial. Participants (students, teachers, parents) should have no difficulty seeing the connection between the goals of reading and the specific expectations that meet this goal. Expectations should be stated in such a manner that students, teachers, and parents will know when they have met them.

We have studied the Council Reports of sixteen Alliance schools that have selected reading as an educational value. Table 1 presents an illustrative list of the expectations that are set forth for students, teachers, and parents.

An examination of these expectations indicates that both teachers and parents share a common responsibility to help children become successful lifelong readers. Adults at both school and home play several crucial roles: coaches who assist the young reader, team leaders who create and nurture small reading circles, role models who demonstrate the joy of reading, and facilitators who help students to learn to use local public libraries.

Parents and teachers also work together to create various school-wide reading programs that take place at school and in the home. Numerous pro-

TABLE 1

SCHOOL COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS FOR READING

STUDENTS	*TEACHERS*	*PARENTS*
Read to family members at least twice a week.	Read to students frequently.	Read to child at least twice each week.
Listen to family members read.	Have students read each day including reading for pleasure.	Listen to child read at least twice each week.
Talk about what has been read.	Make "Writing about Reading" assignments.	Provide interesting reading materials in the home.
Write about what has been read.	Implement an incentive program to encourage all students to read.	Encourage family visits to libraries and book stores.
Obtain a public library card.	Establish a reading recognition program.	Encourage family discussion about reading.
Learn about and use different methods of reading.	Integrate the books of the shared reading program into lessons and activities.	Talk about what the child has been reading at school and home.
Participate in reading incentive programs.	Encourage "Book It" and other home reading programs.	Encourage children to read to each other.
Read books in a shared reading program.	Work with librarian to develop student interests in reading.	Show by example by reading in the home.
Visit library often and take books out for reading enjoyment.	Have students write about their reading in a journal each week.	Read books in the school's shared reading program.
Ask parents to talk about something they have recently read.	Provide a print rich environment in the classroom.	Support "Book It" program.
Participate in "Book It."	Communicate on a regular basis with parents about student's reading progress.	Participate in "Reading at Home" program.
Write about reading by keeping a journal.	Continue to grow professionally in the area of reading instruction.	Establish a family reading time as a regular family activity.
Utilize Sustained Quiet Uninterrupted Independent Reading Time (SQUIRT) at least twice a week.		Talk with children about how reading is used in everyday situations.
Read from a variety of written materials.		

grams have been sponsored by various schools. For example, many schools have considered the "Shared Reading Program." "This program calls for the selection of two books for each grade level to receive special attention in the curriculum of all subject areas, in the activities of the school and in the home" (Redding, 1991). Parents are expected to read the books at home, and numerous activities are possible at school. An annual reading festival can be held at which students perform skits based on episodes in the books. Or the books can be used to create a costume parade in which students dress up according to their favorite character. The "Shared Reading Program" serves as a stimulus to consider reading as an enjoyable and sociable activity that is not limited to the lonely seat work of basals or the ponderous drudgery of thick textbooks.

Teachers also seek to encourage and support parents through numerous strategies of effective communication: parent-teacher conferences, special notes that report on student's progress in reading, and school newsletters that keep parents informed about reading projects, interesting books, and helpful hints for readers in the home. All of these efforts are intended to keep the value of reading uppermost in the minds of teachers, students, and parents.

Reading Programs at Two Alliance Schools

Schools that are part of the Alliance for Achievement are continually searching for new ways to build a strong community of readers. We will report briefly on the innovative work of two schools. The first case involves the incentives of food (pizza and ice cream) programs at Somonauk Elementary School. Several teachers in classes K through 6 participate in "Book It." Each student who meets a monthly requirement will be rewarded for the effort by receiving a small pizza at a local Pizza Hut. If all members of the class meet their reading goals for four out of five months, the class is awarded a pizza party. According to one teacher at Somonauk, "My last four classes have accomplished this [pizza party] for which I am happy. It took some encouraging and note writing on my part, buy it also took some cooperation by the parents" (Grandgeorge, 1992).

A second reading incentive program was sponsored by the School Community Council in the spring of 1991, " I Scream for Reading." This was a six-week program that was open to all students from kindergarten to eighth grade. Students were given a weekly time assignment (depending on grade level) to read independently or have someone read to them. This commitment to reading had to be done in the home with reading material that was not part of the regular school work. Each Friday, students brought back a slip of paper with a daily tally of the amount of time spent reading, and verification with a parent's signature. Students who met the weekly reading requirement were awarded a part of an ice cream sundae complete with nuts, cherry, and whipped cream. Parents assisted by collecting and tallying papers. At the end of the six weeks, twenty-five parent volunteers served ice cream sundaes to the persevering readers. The reader who read the most minutes was give a watch. The room with the greatest total minutes was give a traveling plaque to be kept until next year's program.

One of the teachers at Somonauk interviewed teachers who participated in the "Book It" and "I Scream for Reading" incentive programs. There is general satisfaction with both incentive programs. However, several teachers offered important qualifications to the education value of reading for pizza or ice cream. They were not sure how successful such incentive programs are to develop sustained motivation for independent reading. They were also not sure that these programs alone would keep the poor readers interested in reading on their own. Finally, the teachers did not see the incentive programs as sufficient to improve standardized test scores (Grandgeorge, 1992).

North School in Sycamore, Illinois, has taken a different approach to schoolwide reading activities. The School Community Council has established a Book Month for all kinds of reading projects. The principal, Barb Dunham, challenged her students by agreeing to sit on the school roof dressed as Mrs. Santa Claus if they would read four thousand books. The students read 4, 872 books and enjoyed seeing their principal on the roof. A Reading Worm was places on the wall with each book allowing the Worm to grow a bit longer. In one month, the Reading Worm encircled the inner wall four times. One week was dedicated to inviting people from the community to share one of their favorite childhood books with the children. Students learned that all kinds of adults (e.g., the mayor, the fire chief, a university football player) enjoyed reading. On three spontaneous occasions on Drop-It Day, the principal announced that everyone should drop whatever they were doing and read for ten minutes. On another day, the school adopted Teacher Exchange which allowed teachers to exchange rooms and read to other students in the building. Books were also brought to life with a Book Parade that allowed students to illustrate their favorite book with costumes or posters. Finally, Book Month was a time for Word Day in which students wore clothes with words. The classroom with the most words won a prize.

North School illustrates dramatically the richness of communal activities that can highlight reading as a school value. By concentrating so many diverse activities in one month, all students become aware of the excitement of reading. Reading is no longer a private talk. It is a shared experience to be enjoyed by children and adults alike.

We have argued for the need to define reading as a shared educational value that must be nurtured collaboratively by teachers, parents, and students. This approach to reading has been articulated and implemented by

Sam Redding and his colleagues in the Alliance for Achievement. They are not alone in seeing the educational merit to building communities of readers. Several educational leaders have been extending the boundaries of reading to go beyond the four walls of the classroom. We now turn to some of these endeavors.

Family Literacy Events

Schools which build communities of readers often bring parents, children, and educators together for special events revolving around books and literacy. Parents, children, and teachers in Columbia, Missouri, celebrate one such family literacy event at their Parents and Reading Fair co-sponsored by Columbia Public Schools and Columbia Council of the International Reading Association. The evening is structured in the traditional conference format with a keynote address followed by small group sessions designed to explore various literacy and language topics. After a keynote address by Jerome Harste of Indiana University or another literacy learning expert, parents and children might select to attend a small group session on Enjoying Magazines Together or Turning Kids on to Reading. Small group sessions are designed for kids only, parents only, or parents and kids together. The family literacy night combines educators, children, and parents in an evening of learning about literacy and sharing literature, and builds a sense of community through a shared purpose and shared experiences with texts for children.

In Fairbanks, Alaska, children and parents join teachers in a literary group which meets one hour once a month (Titus, 1991). All participants, children and parents alike, read the same children's book and get together to discuss it in a program they call "Bookends." Limited only by the number of books available, the program is in its fourth year and has included children and their parents, brothers and sisters, and grandparents. The community of readers has read and discussed Ronald Dahl's *Danny: The Champion of the World* (1975), *The Root Cellar* by Janet Lunn (1983), and *The Talking Earth* by Jean George (1983), among others. The evening begins in a whole group meeting followed by small discussion groups. The community of readers is bound by the shared literacy event: they have laughed and cried together, and agreed or disagreed with one another about the books they have read. The community of readers has made these books their own.

Parents as Allies in Children's Home Reading

Reading in the home is one of the most important influences in the literacy learning of children (Harste, Burke, & Woodward, 1981). Several School Community Councils in the Alliance for Achievement have identified reading aloud in the home as an objective in building a community of readers. In

Ohio's Akron public schools, parents were given training in the paired reading program to provide supportive reading for five to fifteen minutes a day (Rasinski & Fredericks, 1991). Based on a program developed in England, paired reading allows children the opportunity to read texts of their own choosing in a supportive environment (Topping, 1987). Although parents may feel that reading is too difficult to teach at home, parents can learn to help their children by adjusting their oral participation according to the support their children need as readers. Ineffective readers often do not have the opportunity to read in an environment which encourages or supports the reading process (Stanovich, 1986). However, when children are given opportunities to read with the help of their parents, children are provided the supportive context for reading, a model for the reading process, and the attention of a parent.

In other parent and home reading endeavors, parents are encouraged to act as models for children by reading for their own purposes. Parents are urged to "pull the plug" of the TV and read aloud to their children daily. They are encouraged to provide opportunities and purposes for their children to read. In Metcalf Laboratory School, Normal, Illinois, children in Carol Owles' kindergarten program select, learn, read, and reread a poem each week in class. The poems are illustrated and collected in each child's poetry notebook which is sent home each weekend to be read with parents. By sharing the poetry with parents, children have a purpose and opportunity for reading, and parents are included in the community of young readers in the school.

Children, parents, and teachers also share writing experiences in a community of readers. Children's beginning efforts in writing are encouraged and valued just as beginning talk is encouraged and valued. Homes and schools provide authentic contexts for writing: shopping lists and letters are valued as children learn to orchestrate print. In the Metcalf kindergarten program, groups of children select an insect to study. Children's books on this insect are sent home with each child. Parents and children together read to find facts about the insect, and children write these facts on their data sheets. Children then compile their data as groups, illustrate their findings, and report these findings to the rest of the class. Parents are active participants as children explore the texts and are also invited to share the children's successes as they present information to the class.

A community of readers is nurtured by having access to a print-rich environment. Although many teachers have had to rely on their own resources to build classroom libraries, schools which build a community of readers acknowledge that all readers must be surrounded by books for children. In some schools, parents, librarians, children, and teachers form groups to generate lists of the school's favorite books, arranged by grade level (Routman, 1991). The book list helps teachers, children, and parents select books from the library and helps parents select books for gifts and book order purchases.

The process of selecting the favorite books to be included on the book list allows the opportunity for members of the community of readers to meet and discuss popular books for children.

School-wide Goals for the Reading Community

In schools which build a community of readers, teachers often set collective and inclusive goals for school-wide reading. Schools establish goals to read a ton of books or read a million pages; books are then weighed, counted, tallied, or logged in some central, highly visual display. Often, there is some reward for meeting the goal; the principal may sit on the roof or do a handstand for the entire school to see. In Diablo Elementary in the Panama Region (O'Masta & Wolf, 1992), children are encouraged to contribute to a school-wide goal of reading a million minutes outside of school. As in the best of these collective school-wide programs, Diablo Elementary's program is not an individual, competitive event, but rather a cooperative activity with all members of the school community working together to reach a mutual goal. The goals in these school-wide programs are extrinsic. Care must be taken to avoid the Pizza Hut effect: If children are only reading books to get a pizza, they will find ways to read only the barest minimum to get the reward. Schools successfully building a community of readers keep sight of the ultimate goal of nurturing readers, not pizza eaters.

In other endeavors, readers are DEARing (Drop Everything And Read) or SQUIRTing (Super-Quiet Uninterrupted Reading Time) as school-wide, inclusive activities. In these schools, fifteen or twenty minutes is set aside daily for everyone in the school to read a book of his or her choice. Still other schools are working with the Postal Service to establish a school-based mail delivery system (Office of Literacy, 1991) to encourage authentic purposes for writing. Schools are pairing children in cross-age buddy reading, writing, and thinking programs (Morrice & Simmons, 1991). Schools are adopting favorite books on a class-by-class basis and transforming hallways into mini-museums highlighting the books during the American Library Association's National Children's Book Week (Lapansky & McAndrew, 1989). In each endeavor, the goals are to excite children about reading, provide opportunities for children to read and write authentic texts, and welcome readers into the literacy club (Smith, 1986).

Designing Environments that Create a Community of Readers

Schools which successfully build communities of readers do so by emphasizing the interactive, social, constructive, and dynamic nature of the reading process (Hartste, 1989). In communities of readers, trade books are readily available, uninterrupted time for reading is scheduled, and readers reflect on and discuss what they read. In a supportive community of readers, successful readers support less effective readers and talk their way through the reading with a partner. The reading and writing endeavors center on meanings, shared understandings, and authentic purposes and audiences.

A community of readers in the home have homes which are littered with print. Books, magazines, cookbooks, and grocery lists are texts central to literacy events. Reading families send notes in lunch boxes, write lists of things to do today, read through the weekly church mailer, and read bedtime stories. Signs are taped to doors to keep out younger brothers, and notes are left on the kitchen table. Families which are communities of readers go to the library, browse through bookstores in the mall, and share different sections of the Sunday paper. Children write for free travel bureau information from Alaska, and write letters of complaint to toy companies when their products break. They write notes of thanks to grandmothers for their birthday gifts. Parents in reading families fuss at kids to be quiet so they can finish their books. Purposes for literacy permeate the home, and children growing up in these homes learn to read just as naturally as they learned to talk.

Readers in the school read to themselves and to others, read and "perform" *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Carle, 1987), write to their favorite authors and illustrators, and write letters to the editor regarding the "no skateboard" ordinance. Students write letters of concern on National Smoke Out Day to a local grocery store that sells candy cigarettes. Teachers and students together explore the geography, history, religion, and culture of the Middle East during conflicts in that region. They write to servicemen, senators, and the Pentagon. Schools of readers build classroom libraries, tally their favorite books, and discuss stories and books daily. Teachers nurturing a community of readers know their students as readers; they know what they like and dislike, recommend books and authors, read aloud favorite parts of books, and discuss books with similar plots or characters. Schools building communities of readers write their own Thanksgiving plays, read aloud to the principal, and host Author's Teas celebrating their publications. Books published by children are catalogued and kept in the school library. The purposes for reading and writing are the threads woven throughout the curricular tapestry.

The complex task of creating a community of readers requires the development of three essential areas of human involvement. The first two areas concern the basic centers of living and learning for the children: the home and the school. Adults in each of these centers of human development must consciously shape endless opportunities to engage the young mind in the wondrous would of print and pictures. The third area essential to building a community of readers is the network of relationships and understanding that connects school and home. A strong bridge is needed for the constant traffic flow between home and school. These three aspects of community building for young readers are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2

THREE ELEMENTS OF A COMMUNITY OF READERS: HOME, SCHOOL, AND COLLABORATIVE LINKS

SCHOOL	*COLLABORATIVE LINKS*	*HOME*
Precepts:		**Precepts:**
Print Rich Environment	Collaborative Leadership Team	Print Rich Environment
Adult Role Models	Articulation of Values, Goals, and Expectations	Adult Role Models
Making Time to Read		Making Time to Read
Sense of Ownership for Young Reader	Effective Two-Way Communication	Sense of Ownership for Young Reader
Intrinsic Reward of Reading	Special Events and Programs	Intrinsic Reward of Reading
Reading as a Social Experience	Emphasize Quality Literature	Reading as a Social Experience

The community of reading must be built inside each home and school. We have identified six precepts which are essential for developing a community of readers (see Table 3). These themes do not pretend to be exhaustive. We merely outline some of the key components of social and cultural enrichment that foster a world of mindful engagement and thoughtful reflection. First and foremost, homes and schools must provide a print rich environment in which the young mind is constantly exposed to all kinds of reading materials. Second, adults are important role models whose own reading habits are daily reminders of the value of reading. Third, reading takes time; therefore, time must be set aside each day for regular reading activities. Fourth, young readers need to explore their own interests through open options to select topics and literature which best fits their curiosity. Fifth, readers must discover the intrinsic enjoyment of reading for enlightenment and pleasure. Teachers and parents must avoid imposing extrinsic rewards for reading on students. Such circumstances are insufficient conditions to create a life-long enjoyment of reading. Sixth, numerous occasions need to be invented for sharing the reading experience with others. These six principles of community building on behalf of reading can be practices in the home and the school. Hopefully, the combined effect of both settings will help to stimulate a strong and enduring commitment to reading.

Homes and schools are ideal settings for creating reading communities. How can one best facilitate active reading in these two learning settings? We answer this question by suggesting a short list of collaborative strategies that

Table 3

CREATING A COMMUNITY OF READERS:
Essential Themes of Community Building Inside Schools and Homes

THEME	SCHOOL	HOME
CREATE AND USE A PRINT RICH ENVIRONMENT	Places throughout school where reading materials are on display and discussion of reading occurs (e.g., classrooms, hallways, cafeteria, principal's office).	Special places in home where variety of reading materials are available and where family can read. Parents and children also visit other print rich places.
ADULTS SERVE AS ROLE MODELS WHO ENJOY READING	Many adults (teachers, volunteers, parents, principal) enjoy sharing their interest in reading through numerous activities (e.g., reading aloud, DEAR, story telling, book reviews).	Parents make a special point to demonstrate their interest in reading for pleasure and information. Parents teach their children how to use all kinds of reading materials.
MAKE TIME FOR READING	Students need to have frequent opportunities to read. This time must exceed conventional time period of reading in the classroom schedule. Some of this time must include entire school as a common experience.	Parents must set aside specific time for reading in the home. Reading time should not be the same as "homework time."
CREATE A SENSE OF OWNERSHIP	Offer numerous opportunities to allow students to explore their own interests through various avenues of reading. The desire to read is enhanced with choices.	Parents can help students enjoy the pleasure of reading by creating opportunities to see the wide vista of reading materials found in public libraries, bookstores, etc.
EMPHASIZE THE INTRINSIC REWARDS OF READING	The sustained commitment to reading is best encouraged when the young reader learns both the skill of reading and the joy of the experience, not through coerced work or through manipulation for extrinsic rewards.	Parents can encourage the intrinsic rewards of reading by helping children find reading materials that interest them and by taking the time to discuss the many interesting aspects of the world that are found in books.
MAKE READING A SOCIAL EXPERIENCE	Reading can be more than solo seat work. It can involve a sense of shared enjoyment and purpose through reading aloud to an audience, dramatizing a story, and discussing ideas and people in a book.	Parents can help their child find meaning in various reading tasks by taking the time to share in the reading experience (e.g., reading to each other, listening to others tell about their reading, etc.)

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Table 4

**CREATING A COMMUNITY OF READERS:
Essential Themes of Collaboration Between School and Home**

THEME	*NATURE OF COLLABORATIVE CONNECTION*
CREATE A STRUCTURE OF COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP	School people and parents need a social arrangement that allows both staff and parents to plan, problem solve, and assess such educational areas as reading.
ARTICULATE VALUES, GOALS, AND EXPECTATIONS OF READING	The mission of the school must place high priority on reading as a crucial learning experience for all children. All adults (principal, teacher, parents) must acknowledge their responsibilities for meeting the goals of reading.
CREATE EFFECTIVE TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION BETWEEN SCHOOL AND HOME	Teachers and parents need to have regular occasions to share information on how well students are meeting various reading expectations. Principals must also create meaningful systems of communication with all parents in the school.
SPONSOR SPECIAL SCHOOL-WIDE EVENTS THAT CELEBRATE THE VALUE OF READING	Numerous school-wide activities can be sponsored by school staff and parents that emphasize the importance of reading, e.g., DEAR (Drop Everything And Read), "Book-It", "Bookends."
HIGHLIGHT BOOKS WORTH READING	School staff and parents have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to introduce high quality books and classics to the next generation of readers. Many programs foster this goal, e.g., Junior Great Books, Shared Reading Program.

are intended to help parents and teachers form a new partnership in reading endeavors. When parents and teachers learn to work together, they strengthen their own respective learning agendas, and they enhance the broader prospects for the child's success.

We offer six collaborative strategies for this alliance for achievement (see Table 4). The first strategy is the need to invent a social arrangement that allows a group of parents and teachers to provide leadership on behalf of all parents and teachers in the school community. This organizational invention can take many titles (e.g., school community council, school improvement team, building leadership team). What is most important is a sense of common purpose and mutual respect for educators and parents. The collaborative team is then in a position to take the second step in building bridges between school and home--articulate values, goals, and expectations about reading for all concerned adults and all students. The third strategy is about communication. The leadership team must see that everyone is informed about the goals of reading as well as the many activities that support these

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goals. The fourth strategy concerns the need to develop numerous programs that highlight reading as a school-wide commitment. It is also important to plan special events that bring parents, students, and teachers together to encourage and celebrate the joy of reading. Our last collaborative suggestion places the accent on quality as an important value for readers of all ages. Parents and teachers need to give self-conscious attention to promoting the rich treasures of high quality literature that provide the context of cultural literacy. These six collaborative suggestions are not intended to be definitive. They are heuristic guides for building thick networks of support between home and school.

Conclusion

We conclude by asserting that reading instruction should not be limited to individual pursuits of students who perform daily assignments according to routine classroom schedules. Reading needs a broader social context that offers endless opportunities for shared learning among and between students, parents, and teachers. Educators and parents can invigorate their school by creating a community of readers who recognize and nurture the value of reading. Community building is a complex task that requires the thoughtful participation of the principal, teachers, and parents. The consequence of such literacy communities is the broad enjoyment of reading and its many benefits by adults and children alike. School leaders are expanding the horizons of reading by defining the printed word as a shared experience. This is the heart of community and the first step toward a better education.

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Someone's Most Precious Darling: Building the Home-School Connection in Preservice Teacher Education Programs

Brenda Power and
Constance M. Perry

Blame it on lousy Maine weather. The inspiration for the "Home-School Connection" project came two years ago, on a dreary December afternoon in 1998 when sleet and freezing rain were streaming outside the windows in Brenda's university office. She was waiting for her last student conference of the day, scheduled for an hour later. As the weather deteriorated, she finally decided to call the student and see about rescheduling later in the week. After looking up the phone number, Brenda realized the student lived on a street not far from her own home. She called and volunteered to stop in for a brief conference at his home in an hour, rather than making him drive on the slick roads to campus.

Jefferson was as formal a student as his name implies. He had entered the M.A.T. program that summer, attempting to shift to a teaching career after a short stint as a geological engineer. He was a cipher as a student – extremely quiet in person, strongly opinionated on paper. It was a surprise and delight to meet him that afternoon at home. A big black Lab sat at his feet, the wood stove roared out heat. While Jefferson's wife worked quietly in the corner, telecommuting to her editing job in Chicago, we talked for over an hour. After thirty minutes, his wife joined us for a cup of tea. Brenda saw a side of Jefferson that was only revealed when he let down his guard in an environment where he was truly comfortable – home.

We talk all the time about the importance of building home-school connections as we work with preservice teachers. There is a wide base of research to support these exhortations (see Comer, 1984; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler,

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1995; Epstein, 1995). We tell these novice teachers that parents will be important, even essential, partners in their work. But if there's one thing we've learned as teacher educators, it's that the things that will endure from our classes are those things our students have tried themselves. We can't just talk about the value of writer's workshop; students who will soon teach themselves need to struggle through crafting a poem or essay. We can't just extol the virtues of discovery science; students need to experience a minds-on approach in our university labs.

Though collectively we have almost 40 years of preservice teacher education experience, we realized we had never made a serious attempt to understand the home-school connection with our students. It was one important area of the curriculum where we never modeled activities and behaviors we hoped our students would emulate. As coordinators of the Elementary Master of Arts in Teaching (M.A.T.) program at the University of Maine, we work with a small cohort of students in a thirteen-month program each year. This program leads to initial K-8 certification in the state of Maine. It is intense, rigorous, and all-consuming for students who complete the program. We know these students well by the end of the year.

In the fall of 1999, we decided to implement a home-school component for the program. The Professional Development School (PDS) Sites selected for the M.A.T. program all have strong family outreach programs. What was missing was a family outreach component in the M.A.T. program itself. We wanted to test out the ideas we had shared for years with our interns. Would building a partnership with families and friends outside the classroom lead to greater learning for students and us? Would interactions with families and friends cause any change in our own thinking about the program? Finally, would experience as a student with teachers building home-school connections change the interns' perceptions of their own work with families in the future?

Designing the Program

Our first priority was to design a program that was doable. Anything enormously time-consuming would not be a model that students could readily adapt to their own work with children. So we began with the premise that we would devote no more than 20 total hours in the fall to building the family-school connection with our preservice interns. This worked out to be a little more than an hour a week stretched over the semester – not a great outlay of time and effort.

The program had four simple components: solicited letters from family and friends, home visits, an open house, and roundtable discussions with parents of children at the professional development school site where we all worked. Our goal was to provide interns multiple ways to participate at whatever level they were comfortable. All events and activities were voluntary – no one was required to participate.

Letters From Home

We began in early September by distributing a revised version of the letters in Figure 1 to the interns, soliciting information about the intern as a learner from a friend or family member. The texts of these letters were developed by Kim Campbell and Ruth Hubbard, teacher educators at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon (Campbell & Hubbard, 1999). Participation in this activity, like all elements of the Home-School Connection, was completely voluntary on the part of interns. We asked the interns to have a friend or family member write a letter about the intern as a learner, to help us better teach our students in the program.

Figure 1: "Letters From Home" Assignment

September, 1999

Dear (student):

As kids advance through their school years, one common complaint is that the home-school connections that are so eagerly forged in the elementary school years fall by the wayside. There's so much to be gained from these bonds. That's one reason we stress continuing to work with families throughout the secondary school years.

As we were talking about making this a priority this year, we realized that we continue to make the same omission – we leave out an important source of information and support – your friends and families. With your help, we'd like to make an attempt to invite those close to you to give us some insights into what helps you learn and what special gifts you bring to the classroom community we are building together.

Please give the attached letter to someone in your family – significant other, son or daughter, mom or dad, close friend, roommate. We'd really appreciate hearing from them. It's not just young children who need the support and insights of family and friends in their educational pursuits. We're all in this together!

Sincerely,

Kim and Ruth

September, 1999

Dear (Friend? Family? Advocate?):

Ideally, schools and families form a partnership, helping each other to create the best possible educational experience for every unique learner. It's what every parent wants for their children, what every teacher wants for the students in their classroom. No surprises here. But what if the school is Graduate School—one that includes both rigorous coursework and an intense year-long internship? And what if the family extends beyond parents, but includes kids, close friends, spouses, and significant others? Shouldn't we still work together to make this the best possible learning environment for our teachers-to-be? We think so.

So, help us out here. Tell us what we should know about and the way she approaches learning. What should we bear in mind? What hidden talents will she bring to the class? What are some tips you have about the best ways to help her grapple with new material and difficult situations? We'd really appreciate it if you'd take a few minutes and write a letter to us and tell us what we need to know—help us get to know her a little better as we embark on this journey together.

With Downright Good Cheer!
Kimberly Campbell, Cohort Leader
Ruth Hubbard, Friend of the Cohort

We were leery about asking family members and friends to write full letters. We toyed with the idea of distributing some sort of survey instead. But Hubbard and Campbell assured us that we would get a high response rate, based upon their own work with interns.

Within a month, we had received letters from 10 of 12 friends or family members of our students. We were surprised at the variety of responses, and the care these folks put into explaining the intern to us.

Here is an example of one letter we received from a parent. Lorna Tobin, a veteran teacher herself, reveals how much we can learn about an adult student from someone who has observed their child since birth. She writes about her daughter Jill Tobin, an M.A.T. intern:

October 8, 1999

Dear Brenda and Connie,

The following is information about Jill that I hope will be helpful to you in providing the best possible learning environment for her.

What should you know about Jill? Having been voted as "class wit" in eighth grade, she has earned that reputation honestly. She is both funny and witty and finds it easy to laugh. She's casual and down to earth. She's easily touched by the gentle souls in the world. She likes kids (and us old folks too!). She attaches to cute kids and old folks easily (she'll want to take them home with her). She's not as naive as she was growing up as an only child and being very protected by both parents. Sharing feelings and being able to recognize them in other people is a strong attribute of hers. As a result of that, she is able to see through the insincerity of people. As a child, she used to line her dolls up on the stairs and using her fingers as puppets create "her family" through role playing. Her strong family ties are very important to her. She loves her Gramps and keeps him supplied with "Big Bird" Band-Aids and chocolate chip cookies. She is poised, personable and painfully neat (takes after her mother!). She has ethics and character (and is one too!).

It would be important to bear in mind that she is not afraid to confront issues and can get quite indignant about injustices. I would have to say she is intensely loyal though not always wisely.

A hidden talent that she may bring to class is her art in baking wonderful goodies. Another is her ability to impersonate, of course, teasing to be funny. Her secret wish is to write children's stories someday. She certainly has the talent to be her own illustrator, too.

Teaching and learning began at a very early age for Jill. It was brought into focus after her kindergarten screening, she came home climbed up on the kitchen table on her hands and knees and gave her Gramps a "peering and screaming" test (a.k.a. "Kindergarten Screening") which, of course, he failed. Schoolwork has always been a priority. She has high expectations for herself and others. She doesn't mind hard work as long as "it makes sense." She is a practical thinker. Objective type tests stress her out. She appreciates writing to show what she knows. Hands-on is best. She also needs time to process.

Hope that what I have shared will help you get to know Jill better. Good luck on your journey!

Forever learning,

Lorna Tobin

Letters from parents were heartfelt. We had glimpses of our students as children struggling to learn to play the piano, or dealing with their first poor grade from a stern teacher. In contrast, letters from the interns' friends were brutally honest. They warned us that we needed to set high personal and professional standards if we were to gain the respect of these interns. We could see our students sitting up all night in dorm rooms with these friends, railing against hypocritical professors who do not "practice what they preach" or place unrealistic demands on students. Some letters came through e-mail; others were carefully written by hand on the finest stationary. The letters were a powerful beginning to understanding the lives our students had far beyond the classroom.

Home Visits

The second element of the home-school program was initiated in early October, when we made visits to the homes of students. Once again, this program was voluntary. We worried about imposing on students who might be in difficult home situations. We again had 10 of 12 students volunteer for visits.

We know home-school visits can be prohibitively time-consuming for teachers. With that in mind, we adapted a home-school visit format developed by Terri Austin (1994), a teacher in Fairbanks, Alaska. Terri sends out a letter to parents of her sixth grade students, informing them that she will be dropping in for visits on a designated Saturday. She lets parents know the visits will be brief, and they needn't change their plans to stay home and wait. If no one is home, she moves on to the next closest home in the neighborhood. Terri easily stops in at all 27 students' homes during a long Saturday, popping in for no more than 20 minutes at each home.

We picked two afternoons in October, and informed students we would be making visits from 4-7 p.m. We asked students who volunteered for visits which date was preferable, as well as for directions to their homes. We mapped out a route which involved the least time and travel between sites, and easily made all the visits within five hours on two nights. Eight of ten interns were home when we stopped in.

Once again, we were astonished at what we learned. We knew a few of our students were single moms, but there is a difference between knowing this and seeing them tend to their children even as they welcome us into their homes. We know our students live below the poverty line. That fact became more real when we visited tiny homes with no running water in the kitchen, or basement apartments with stereos blaring. We thought about how often we tell students they need to spend $25 for an "essential" book, and we see their faces fall. We were reminded of our own days in graduate school, when we often had to choose between one of those "essential" books and groceries for the week.

Open House

The third element of the program came in early November, when we had an open house at our local professional development school site just for family and friends. We met parents, grandparents, young children, spouses, and significant others. The interns delighted in giving their loved ones tours of the place that was taking so much of their time away from family and friends throughout the year.

Roundtables

The fourth and final element of the program was an afternoon series of roundtables with parents of children at the PDS site. We placed 2-3 interns with 3-4 parents, and asked them to have an open conversation about the role of parents in schools. Parents were asked to give their best advice to teachers just beginning their careers. We asked each group to have a note-taker, and then we compiled these notes later for everyone to analyze.

When we shared these notes with the teachers at the PDS, they were surprised at how much of the discussion at each table was about home-school visits. Interns asked parents about the best ways and times to structure these visits. "I don't understand," said one mentor teacher. "Why would they ask about home visits when it isn't something we do?" We realized our interns valued the visits because they had experienced them with us, and now clearly saw the importance of incorporating these visits into their own teaching in the future.

Findings and Future Work

It would be impossible to capture all that we learned from making the home-school connection. Our learning is clustered in three broad areas:

1. Families have a crucial role to play in facilitating learning for students of all ages. We heard echoes of the admonitions in the letters from family and friends throughout the year. We learned more about our students' learning styles, preferences, and quirks than we could have in a month of Myers/Briggs testing.
2. Building even small connections to the home will affect academic programs in unexpected ways over an extended period of time. We'll give just one example of unexpected insight from the program. We noticed a few interns came alone to the open house, even though attendance wasn't required. We quickly realized they came to tour the classrooms where other interns worked. We had mistakenly believed the interns had a good sense of the layout and décor of classrooms throughout the

school, but this wasn't the case. Schools are busy places, and there is rarely time to get into the classrooms of colleagues. This insight led to the development of a classroom visitation program for both interns and mentors that was implemented in the spring, and proved to be the most popular element of the spring internship for both mentors and interns.

3. What we do as teacher educators still has far more impact than what we say. Throughout the spring, we saw interns develop a rich variety of outreach programs in collaboration with their mentor teachers. From newsletters to family nights to new formats for parent conferences, the interns showed us how much they came to value including family and friends in the learning process. Though we can't prove a direct correlation with our own work, we did see more family outreach by far than in any previous year.

We now plan to include these activities and experiences every fall. In addition, we are going to add a "neighborhood walk" activity in September, which will allow interns to walk in teams through the local streets and analyze the communities where the families of their students live, work, and play.

Final Thoughts

We live in an age when standards and testing move us farther and farther away from acknowledging the importance of affect in our students' lives. Our work in building the home-school connection reminded us of the power of including those lives beyond our classroom walls in the programs we design for students. The barriers between school and home are strong, well-built, and often well-guarded over time. One of our favorite poems, "Aspects of Autumn" by Roberta Chester, expresses beautifully how even the youngest students learn quickly that home and school will be disconnected:

Aspects of Autumn

On the first day
my grandfather took me to school.
His accent was thick and so he kept
his voice beneath his tongue, never
speaking once we left the house,
and now we stood, my hand pressed in his,
face to face with Mrs. McCarthy. Then it would have
embarrassed me to death, but now
I wish he had said, "This child
is more precious than gold, she is my heart,"
and suddenly we would have seen the pins
flying from her head and would have
heard them striking in the far corners
of that room like thunderbolts.
Instead, the silence was deep
enough to drown, as she put me down
on the chart and pointed to a table
where the children sat around a can
of broken crayons. All that long year
we would fight about each stick of bright wax
as if it were a wand our lives depended on
to get the world right, as if only blue
would keep the sky from falling.

Even now, the smell of crayons
sweetening the darkness of a tin can
lingers on and has the power to turn me
around and around as if it is really full
of tears and beards, and shoes and tears
and whispers, and pictures
of our old houses with the lights out
where our lost crayons may still be lying.

Roberta Chester

Simply put, every student in our care is someone's most precious darling, more valuable to them than gold. Whether our students are five years old or forty, entering kindergarten or starting on the path to be certified as a teacher – there is almost always someone out there who cares deeply about each of them. And with the care comes awareness of that student as a learner. They may not speak our language when it comes to talking about learning, and they might not be wholly comfortable in school environments. But a wide range of opportunities for families and friends to teach us about students can lead to a high rate of family participation in a home-school outreach program for students.

Now we don't know how we managed to teach at the university for all these years without tapping this incredible resource. Time devoted to building the home-school connection with preservice teachers is truly time well-spent.

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*I*N OUR EFFORTS *to give children the schools they deserve, we tend to focus on the variables most clearly within the control of educators—professional development, curriculum, instructional strategies, school organization. Of course these aspects of schooling are hugely important, but so too are the relationships among the people who constitute a school community—teachers, students, staff, parents. Affecting these relationships in positive ways is work that often lies beyond the scope of a traditional management mindset. Yet because we often give too little attention to the sense of community among the constituents of a school, our efforts to make schools better fall short. The community of the school is not a comforting abstraction; it is a reality that serious educational leaders must understand and encourage.*

JoAnn Manning
Director
Laboratory for Student Success

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